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Religion and Politics in Contrast and Complementarity

I

THE CRISIS

Today the human race is facing a crisis more serious than any it has encountered in the past, because its very survival is in danger. In all ages there were prophets of doom. Though most often they spoke with personal conviction, their focus was on particular contexts and circumscribed issues. But today's prophets speak with scientific authority, and the facts they present involve the whole human race and the planet earth itself. Today mankind is caught up in a storm of crisis, problems, and the ever accelerating pace of change leave little time to think calmly and clearly. Human extinction through nuclear and biological warfare appears a distinct possibility. As Aurelio Pecci states in his *Chasm Ahead*¹, "Mankind is galloping in the direction of assured and possibly total disaster." Hence this is a situation in which all the different branches of knowledge should focus attention on the future of man on earth. Here politics and religion represent two poles of the human search for finding a way out of the present situation of crisis, one immediate and practical, the other transcendental and far-reaching. Politics which studies the utilization and organization of the various available immediate resources for the common good has to work with a clear model of future humanity in mind. Religion, on the other hand, dealing with the ultimate meaning and concerns of human life must show how those values can be made secure not only for present day population but for future generations as well. This article will briefly examine how different models and programmes of the political society have deep religious implications and demand, therefore, a close collaboration with religions in their common search for the good of the whole man.

1. Aurelio Pecci, *The Chasm Ahead* (New York : Macmillan, 1969), p.1.

The sad fact of the present situation is that there is not much harmony between religion and politics in planning and working out the solution for the human predicament today. In taking stock of the different dynamic factors involved in working for the development of man religion is not often included, or at best counted only as a minor sub-section of sociology. W. Warren Wager states in his *Building the City of Man*²: "The most spectacular fossils in the twentieth century's museum of dead faiths are those of the traditional religions, such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism." Religions are accused of sowing divisiveness among people with their divergent creeds and of providing outdated solutions to entirely new situations and problems.³ The world models depicted by the major religions are said to be redolent of a bygone age and the fundamental truths they present inextricably interwoven with details that appear strange, purely mythological and unscientific to the modern man accustomed to the method and procedure of empirical sciences. Given the diversity of religions and the diversity of their beliefs and practices, people are said to find it difficult to differentiate between truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, and hence religions themselves are accused of being the chief enemy of religion.

The New World Models

There is no unanimity or unity of perspective or agreement in programmes of action in the political field either, even among those who try to find solutions to the modern crisis outside religions through scientific analysis and schemes for action. There are some who feel that since we have permitted the development of crisis beyond the capacity of present governments to handle, only a world dictatorship can save us from total disaster, even though this may have to be at the cost of many lives and natural resources, and the sacrifice of many of the precious freedoms enjoyed by people in most countries. But any such dictatorship since it is not based on a universal value system or perspective of ultimate meaning will result in the imposition of the values of a particular individual group on all the worst type of slavery that can be imagined. Some claim that in the present crisis freedom

2. W. Warren Wager, *Building the City of Man* (New York : Grossman, 1971), p. 22.

3. Archie J. Bahm, *The Philosopher's World Model* (Westport : Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 193.

has become a luxury we can illafford and that since our freedom is already conditioned by circumstances there must be a universal programme for conditioning the thinking and attitudes reinforcing the responses negatively or positively as required so that all may be made to shed hatred and live in harmony. But the question is who is, to be charged with the conditioning and who is to condition the conditioners. There are those who plead that unless we plan with the aid of computers a global equilibrium with regard to increases in population, the use of natural resources, agricultural production, industrial output and pollution, the world will be reaching a sort of dead end within the next century.⁴ Here again the question is, who is to organize the planning that puts innumerable restrictions on the creativity of individuals and nations. Many question the reliability of computer predictions. Besides, are the five factors mentioned above the only important ones that merit consideration in speculating about the future of humanity? Hence others call for a holistic approach that would emphasize the interdependence of various factors including the above five, as well as others like the significance of cultural, ideological, political and economic influences that determine the future course of events, and work towards the creation of a new mankind.⁵

What seems possible and useful for us in this context is to take a synthetic approach, consider the complementarity of the different world models presented by political thinkers and examine their deeper implications in the light of the ultimate concerns of human life on which religions focus their attention. The various world models emphasize the need for planning to meet the present crisis creatively and imaginatively, the urgency for reshaping the international order, the task of proposing achievable goals for mankind, and the prophetic role of calling attention to the future possibilities and dangers that face mankind as a whole.

The first significant attempt to achieve a comprehensive political planning for the world was made in 1968 by a group known as the Club of Rome under the leadership of Aurelio Pecci, a scientist affiliated with the Fiat and Olivetti companies, Alexander King, the

4. D. H. Meadows et al; *The Limits to Growth* (Washington D. C. : Potomac Associates, 1972).

5. Mihailo Mesarovic, *Mankind at the Turning Point*, the Second Report to the Club of Rome, (New York : E. P. Dutton, 1974).

scientific director of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, Saburo Okita, head of the Japan Economic Research Centre, and others, which commissioned a number of research studies in intercontinental co-operation regarding the situation of humanity. The first of these studies directed by Dennis L. Meadows at the M.I.T., under the title *The limits of Growth*, calls for a computerized universal planning in order to save the world from the disaster that must follow an unlimited and unplanned growth. Profiting from earlier studies on population growth, depletion of natural resources and the destruction of ecological balance through growing industrialization, it calls for careful planning in these areas. It warns that if present trends continue, within the next century we will have exhausted the natural resources, polluted nature completely, and reached the limits of growth. But it claims that owing to the relative accuracy of computer predictions on the basis of present data, formal or mathematical models can be devised for the future functioning of the world as a system. Though many have criticized the study for its over-reliance on computers, it succeeded in arousing fears about global dangers and stimulated world-wide efforts to find appropriate models for the future world.

The second report to the Club of Rome under the title *Mankind at the Turning Point*, prepared by Mihailo Mesarovic and Edward Pestel, expanded the earlier study by bringing into the scope of world planning the significance of cultural, ideological, political and economic influences in shaping the future course of events. It also drew attention to the interdependence of these various factors conceived in terms of organic growth. It called for a holistic approach and predicted that an approach to the problems in a perspective of organic growth will lead to the creation of a new mankind. The different regions of the world have to be treated hierarchically as parts of the whole, not statically, but as consisting of multilevel organic processes growing in interaction. The differences in regional, cultural and political growths have positive value since they influence the nature of peoples and communities and also the whole human race. Today mankind is called upon to face the most awesome test of its history: "the necessity of a change in the man-nature relationship and the emergence of a new perception of mankind as a living global system."⁶

6. *Mankind at the Turning Point*, p. 146.

The solution proposed by the report is basically political: Global issues can be solved only by a global concerted action. Nations working independently, each looking for its own special interests, cannot draw up the organic growth master plan for the world system in view of the complexity emerging from increasingly megalopolitan and global interdependencies. The world has reached a point where holistic planning is needed if mankind as a whole is to survive. Only long-range planning and commitment to action can resolve the present criss which result from long-range development. The book proposes the division of the world into ten regions each having a "political, economic and environmental coherence," and at the same time all working in interdependence and mutual interaction. There is the need to conscientize people about the human problems such as poverty, famine, epidemics and earthquakes to make all feel more and more identified with humanity as a whole, and to create a new ethic recognizing the limited amounts of irreplaceable resources and demanding a more conscientious use of them.

The third report to the Club of Rome was prepared by Ervin Laszlo and a group of collaborators and consultants⁷. As the title indicates, the emphasis is on setting achievable goals in bridging the gap between developed and developing countries, satisfying legitimate demands for housing, food, clothing, jobs and medical and social services, at the same time avoiding the side effects of urban congestion, alienation, invasion of privacy, unemployment and inflation. Laszlo believes that an international agency can co-ordinate energy research and development and that global security can be achieved through a balanced reduction of military strength. He points out that only a level of solidarity in mankind can create the collaboration to achieve the goals and that for this the major religions of the world like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism with their great potential for promoting unity have to make a greater contribution than what they are doing at present.

Politics and World Order

Perhaps a more basic political problem is how to prevent the bad side effects of scientific and technological progress, namely, the possibility of a nuclear war that can mean even the end of humanity itself.

7. Ervin Laszlo, *Goals for Mankind : A Report to the Club of Rome on the New Horizons of the Global Community* (New York : E. P. Dutton, 1977).

When science and technology has enabled several nations to stockpile nuclear arms sufficient to destroy all life on our planet several times over, a final catastrophe may envelop us even without any one consciously willing it. Our last two world wars broke out as the result of relatively trivial incidents. A great number of studies published in the past decade have tried to find a solution to this problem. Some of them focus attention on a world educational effort to bring about a system of international relations in which war can be eliminated and a world wide economic welfare and social justice can be achieved.

Others point out that the roots of war lie in the inequality between nations and the exploitation and domination of developing countries by developed countries. The main problem is that the economic gap between rich and poor continues to widen. The spread of technology has led to an increase in human population and the net result of progress is an actual regress in human happiness. Even though actual colonialism has virtually ceased, economic and cultural colonialism still continues. The solution to this, some suggest lies in a reduction of technological growth in the First World, transfer of needed technology to the Third World, increasing autonomy for Third World nations, and a strong initiative by the Third World countries against the over-powering culture and worldview prevailing in the First World countries, which will never voluntarily end their dominance. Though the multiplicity of nations may be reduced to a more manageable twenty or twentyfive political units, the retention of the nation-state is considered integral to any movement towards a better world.⁸

But people in the First World countries are still thinking in terms of a logic of transnationalism and supranationalism represented by international institutions and multi-national corporations supported by co-operating governments, promoting the international movement of goods, ideas and people without government participation. In this way, they hope, they can achieve peace, well-being, justice, ecological balance, social conditions promoting harmony, joy, creativity, the use of science and technology in ways that ensure the realization of human values, and a conception of ethics as including man and nature relations

8. Rajni Kothari, *Footsteps into the Future : A Diagnosis of the Present World and a Design for an Alternative* (New York: The Free Press, 1974), pp. xx, 292, 99, 119.

while at the same time eliminating coercive governmental authority.⁹ But given the profit motive that dominates multinational corporations and the domination of international institutions by the developed countries, such optimistic world visions do not carry conviction to the disadvantaged peoples of the world.

Many hope that the world of tomorrow can be tamed without force through shared values. But the Third World countries which remained for centuries under colonial domination have to generate their own nationalistic momentum in order to rebel against encroachments of a Euro-centric cultural universe. As long as the Third World retains a feeling of structural and cultural dependency, one cannot hope for that cultural parity that has to be the basis for world harmony. This means that the erstwhile colonized societies must seek to protect more effectively their own cultural heritages¹⁰. Besides, political institutions that took centuries to develop in Western countries cannot be transplanted overnight and flourish in countries that gained independence only recently. As Rajni Kothari has shown in a series of articles which appeared in the Indian Express recently, corruption and bribery have become a way of life in the Indian political scene draining the very life blood of democracy. This is true of most of the new democracies. Political institutions cannot be imported. To be effective they must grow out of the culture of a nation. On the other hand, Western culture itself has to be infiltrated by non-Western values "to help make the global pool of shared culture less Euro-centric and more diversified."¹¹ Given the increasing economic interdependence of nations, growth in global communications and transportation, the expansion of multinational corporations and processes restructuring global economy, there is some hope that we can realize a sense of world community and a world without borders¹². What is needed is that we "reorder global priorities" by reducing military spending and employing all our resources for the elimination of poverty¹³.

9. Richard A. Falk, *A Study of Future Worlds* (New York : The Free Press, 1975), pp. 438, 485, 493.

10. Ali A. Mazrui, *A Federation of World Cultures : An African Perspective* (New York : The Free Press, 1976).

11. *Ibid.*

12. Lester A. Brown, *World without Borders* (New York : Random House, 1972), p. 344.

13. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society* (New York : Basic Books, 1973), pp. 205, 208, 297-8.

II

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Politics and Ideology

From what we have seen above it is clear that world politicians are looking for a theoretical justification for a world model that can overcome the present crisis. But this search for an ideological basis seems to have a paradoxical aspect to it. On the one hand, politics is a practical science that seeks to discover the various factors and actors that constitute the organization and ordering of society towards the public good and transform individuals into citizens. In fact "it is an ordering of power to cope with the challenges of the age."¹⁴ It is concerned with the selection and training of its leaders, setting up of an effective system of administration that will at the same time provide scope for the greatest amount of participation for the members of the society in consciously and freely moving towards the common good. Hence it focuses attention on the process of policy making, ways of recognizing problems confronting society, mobilizing support for alternative solutions to them, identifying issues demanding decision and implementing the decisions. Hence becoming preoccupied with ideologies can detract from the efficiency of the political process. As Frederick D. Wilhelmsen has remarked, "the advent of political philosophy in a society usually augurs ill for the society"¹⁵ and is often a nostalgia for an imagined golden past which can never be restored. All ideologies seem to idolize a sublimated past or a future of mere wishful thinking. Scholars like Aristotle and Aquinas who outlined politics on theoretical lines created only text systems which lack a certain relevance to the concrete life of people.

On the other hand, without an ideological basis politics cannot have depth of thought nor carry conviction to the people. As Z. Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington state, a political system is effective to the extent that the history behind it has achieved a certain ideological consensus that legitimize the system. For only ideals and principles can furnish the leaders with a hierarchy of goals to shape their policy choices

14. Z. Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power USA, USSR* (New York : Penguin Bks, 1978), P. 5.

15. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Christian & Political Philosophy* (Athens : Univ. of Georgia Press, 1978), p. 1.

and decisions. Politics is not merely exercise of power but a matter of will.¹⁶ President Truman's words that the power of the presidency is the power to persuade is true about all political authority in general.

The diversity of political systems have at their deepest level an ideological diversity. The oft-quoted words of Alexis de Tocqueville uttered a century and a half ago are valid even today :

The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centres all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter servitude. Their starting point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.

Various political systems of the world have tried to combine in different degrees the good elements of both, avoiding their evil effects. But without some commonly held truths, at least implicitly, these different systems cannot work towards the common good. In providing this ideological basis for politics religions had a great role to play.

In speaking about the historical role of religion in politics a clear distinction has to be made between religious values and religious systems or traditions. It is true that religion was closer to the life of the people than philosophy, which as a rational quest of ultimate causes maintained a sort of ideological detachment from concrete situations. But though religious values were intimately fused with the concrete experience, life and practice of the people, religious systems and traditions further reified them transforming faith into beliefs, customs, taboos and precepts. These religions had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with politics.

Religion a Tool of Politics

Historically, religion was often a powerful tool in the hands of political authority to keep the people obedient to their laws and directives. For the Greeks nature or *physis*, the dynamic principle of birth and growth was the source of all political order, since law, especially natural law was both an extension and a crowning of the dynamic

16. Brzezinski and Huntington, *l. c.* pp. 5-9.

tendency in all things to develop and become fully themselves. Especially in man, law was the perfection which consciously recognized as its goal, the imperatives of his own humanity, and so natural law was recognized as the principle of harmony and order within society and within the cosmos. But since man extends the harmony of his own microcosm into the larger universe he naturally postulates that he needed some presiding authority in the cosmos. Plato in his *Laws* states that as animals are ruled by men, being superior to them, so men have to be given laws by an order of beings above them, namely, the Gods. Several of the Greek lawgivers like Lycurgus tried to justify the laws made by them by appealing to a Delphic oracle or to a command of one God or other.

Even natural law can survive only with the public authority that can interpret it. As we see evidenced in the trial and condemnation of Socrates there is always a tension between the dictates of reason and the public sentiment especially of the ruling classes. Integral to politics is a certain public orthodoxy which may be defined as the "tissue of judgments, defining the good life and indicating the meaning of human existence, which is held commonly by the members of any given society, who see in it the charter of their way of life and the ultimate justification of their society."¹⁷ It is a purely legal orthodoxy in terms of which the members of a community agree upon the political instruments that are to govern them. The Greek *politeia* or way of life depended upon what the society regarded as respectable, the ideal of the urban gentleman, who in turn was measured and created by his allegiance to the institutions of the city. It is the matrix of convictions often enshrined in customs and folklore, formalized in constitutions, charters and creeds. It makes the society what it is and distinguishes it from other institutions. Variousy designated as culture, way of life and the like, this public orthodoxy is the basis of the scientific elaboration of sociology, politics and even of philosophy. This *politeia* or public orthodoxy is more fundamental than law, philosophy and religion. Marcus Tullius Cicero locates the study of laws in a hierarchy of sciences which first answers the question: what is the best regime?. He identifies this regime with the Roman Republic; laws should suit this *politeia* and not the *politeia* the laws. So naturally even religion is called upon to confirm and support the existing public orthodoxy, because this latter is a

17. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *l. c.* p. 26.

cosmion of meaning, in the terminology of Eric Voegelin, illuminated from within by and for the members of the society, and it is in its light that everything else is perceived.

Rome presents the typical example of how the public orthodoxy shaped and controlled religion. Cicero in his *De Legibus* starts from the basic doctrine that the whole universe is "one commonwealth of which both gods and men are members." All including the "supreme God" are bound by right reason, the most divine attribute in all heaven and earth, and since reason is law men have law in common with the gods, and those who share law share also justice.¹⁸ We have to look for the roots of law and justice in virtue, and virtue is nothing else but Nature perfected and developed to its highest point.¹⁹ Cicero rejects the historicist position that everything is just which is found in the custom or law of nations. For, "justice is one, it binds all human society, and is based on one law which is right reason applied to command and prohibition"²⁰. He is also against the pragmatist position that one has to obey the law because it would be expedient to do so and it would be useless to try to disobey it. To this he answers that justice does not exist at all if it does not exist in Nature, and hence it is in response to one's own nature that one should act. Hence religion itself and the rites and pious observances in honour of the gods, the laws and customs of society that join man to the divine in intimate bond, all spring from Nature. For Cicero religion is a need of the Republic, a means for its preservation. It does not matter whether religion is true or false, whether the gods really exist or not. Belief in the gods and pious observance of the rites dedicated to them have bred in the Roman people that austerity and rectitude, that *gravitas* which has made Rome possible and which alone can assure her continued existence.

Not that the Romans assumed religion as a policy for the preservation of the state. The public belief in the gods was not a calculated policy to instrumentalize religion, but just a belief which created the public orthodoxy. So Cicero speaking directly to the state gives precedence to the political over the metaphysical or religious. Right at the start we must persuade the people that the gods are the lords and rulers of all things and that they take account of the pious and impious, for,

18. Cicero, *De Legibus*, 1, 7,

19. *Ibid*, 1, 8.

20. *Ibid*, 15, 1.

“who will deny that such beliefs are useful when he remembers how often oaths are used to confirm agreements, how important to our well-being is the sanctity of treaties, how many persons are deterred from crime by the fear of divine punishment, and how sacred an association of citizens becomes when the immortal gods are made members of it, either as judges or as witnesses.”²¹

For this practical reason Cicero defends the ancient Twelve Tables which stipulated: “No one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognized by the state.”²² Persians burned down the Greek temples on the ground that these shut up the gods within walls, seeing that the whole universe is their temple and home. Romans erected their temples in a better fashion: “For it has been our wish, to the end that we may promote piety towards the gods, that they should dwell in the cities with us.” In Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, Cotta, the Roman high priest defends religion against Balbus the philosopher not by reason, but by the civic theology of the Fathers of Rome: “The belief as to the worship of the immortal gods . . . is inherited from our forefathers.”²³ Reason which pretends to bypass the exigencies and demands of society can lead both to belief and unbelief. Hence the authority of the fathers, of the society, of the state, is considered a surer and safer guide. Reason is a risk that may bring with it the eventual ruin of the state.

In every religious tradition we can discern this political strand, the undercurrent of a public orthodoxy that seeks to use religion for its own justification, and keep the gods under state control. In China the Confucian religious tradition was a creation of the aristocracy to justify and preserve the authority of the ruling class by appealing to the ideals of the nobility as sanctioned by Heaven. In Hinduism the kings tried to consolidate their empires and enhance their powers by encouraging their bards to create myths about the royal descent from the gods. Both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* present a popular religion that assures the common man that incarnations of the gods are at the helm

21. *Ibid*, 2, 6. In his *Republic* Cicero argues strongly for the universal natural law: “There is indeed a law, right reason, which is in accordance with nature; existing in all, unchangeable, eternal . . . It is not one thing at Rome, and another thing at Athens . . . but it is a law, eternal and immutable for all nations and for all time.”

22. Cicero. *De Legibus* 2, 8.

23. *De Natura Deorum*, 3, 2-3.

of state affairs. Islam took over the socio-political structure of the Arab tribes replacing the bond of blood and pact with that of a common faith and culture. In Christianity the burnings of witches and heretics were motivated not only by a passion for truth, but more especially also by a common sentiment that a denial of the common creed was a threat to society itself. Sometimes heresies did not start as doctrinal controversies but as political rivalries that later sought support from religion.

The Critical Role of Religion

Christians and Jews were persecuted by imperial Rome not because they presented any serious threat to Roman military might, but because they challenged the Roman attitude towards religion, the right of the state to control the faith of the people. Judaism had a theocratic ideal in politics. The prophet Samuel permitted Jews to have their own king as a grudging concession, with the direst predictions about his abuse of power, only because the people insisted that they should be ruled like their neighbouring countries. Still, the monarchy was very much under the guidance and constant nagging by the prophets who spoke with the authority of religion. St. Paul found the benevolent rule of Rome favourable to the Christians over against the intolerant religious hegemony of the Jews. But by the time St. Matthew's Gospel was written, Rome's attitude had changed and the golden rule was stated: "Give what is Caesar's to Caesar and God's to God".

St. Thomas Aquinas following the lead of Aristotle evolved a whole "theology" of politics. Aristotle, who elaborated the political existence of man, also recognized that there are certain elements in human life like friendship, which though useful to politics transcended politics. Besides, though man's political nature is natural, his political life and the systems of government he lived under are created by man. Since what man makes is other than what he discovers²⁴ there is a certain strangeness between them. Unlike politics, natural law can make certain claims on man. In bridging this gap between the political nature of man and the reality of political institutions even philosophy cannot be an ultimate arbiter according to Aquinas: Though primary precepts of natural law can never be eradicated from man, the human reason dulled

24. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1094 a- 1095 a.

by vice and beset with the forces of evil can easily fail to recognize its secondary and tertiary precepts²⁵. Here divine revelation comes to the aid of man disclosing not only those mysteries that completely transcend human reason, but also those truths that are theoretically knowable by reason. This natural law illumined by revelation can never be the captive of any political order, but is a check on every polity. It is the enemy of every tyranny, which is the effect of the 'tyrannical soul, intruding into the body politic in the name of blind passion or ideological insanity as Plato has noted²⁶. Aquinas does not favour one form of government in preference to another. He is only concerned with the duties of the king in the pursuit of a common good, his relation to the spiritual power, and the ways in which a king has to organize and establish the city²⁷. Theoretically a purely royal form of government may be absolutely the best, insofar as it imitates the command of the passions by a rational soul and realizes the government of the philosopher-king advocated by Plato in the *Statesman*²⁸. But as Aristotle insists in his *Politics*²⁹, where there is no one man with heroic or god-like virtue it would be a violation of justice "that one man should be lord of all." Then other forms of government have to be introduced, like the political regime, in which the power of the ruler is circumscribed by the laws, or the "mixed" that is both royal and political, where the prince rules only over certain things which fall under his authority and is in part subject with regard to those which he himself is under the law. But "the best form of government is found in any city or kingdom wherein one is given the power to preside over all, while under him there are others having governing powers" and the government is shared by all.³⁰

25. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a 2ae q. 95, a 1. Aquinas is a strong supporter of natural law. In 1a 2ae q. 91 he argues: "It is clear that the whole community of the universe is governed by divine reason. This rational guidance of created things on the part of God we call the Eternal Law . . . But of all others, rational creatures are subject to the divine Providence in a special way . . . in that they control their own actions . . . This participation of the Eternal Law by rational creatures is called the Natural Law."

26. Plato, *Republic*, 562 a - 565 d.

27. Aquinas, *Summa*, I, q 103.

28. Plato, *The Statesman*, 269 - 301 a.

29. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1288 a.

30. Aquinas, *Summa*, 1a 2ae q 105, a 1.

The Autonomy of Politics

But politics is neither theology nor metaphysics. It cannot be dictated to from the outside. Its principles are governed by induction through the sense and the memory" as Sir John Fortescue states in his *De Laudibus Legum Anglie*. Especially since God and religion ceased to exert considerable influence on the practical life of peoples, efforts were made to define politics in terms of factors germane to it. Already Plato had spoken about the opinions of those who found the origin of the rule of law in the compromise of those who could not impose injustice on their fellowmen,³¹ and Augustine had defined his city of man as "a body of men united by consent of law and by community of interests."³² But the absolute independence of politics was affirmed by modern thinkers like Machiavelli, Hobbes and Jean Bodin. For Hobbes, the state emerged as the result of a contract of men and nations tired of the law of the jungle, who wanted finally to be governed by men who would protect them against their enemies. Greek philosophy was based on the discovery of *physis*, something which endures through time and resists the decadence of individual things. The Greek approach to the political existence of man was rational, looking upon virtue as the very spine of human life, and it integrated evil and failure into its abstract rational system as a flaw in the hero following the pattern of man's propensity to evil. Romans, on the other hand, integrated the irrational into their political world, accepting chance and fortune as vehicles through which Rome would achieve its destiny. In the sphere of political power they combined the subjective and the objective, the former standing for character, art and industry and the latter for circumstance, fate and fortune or the gods.³³ Even Augustine sees history as moving towards Apocalypse and the end of time, guided, of course, by the finger of God.³⁴ Romans, when they found their Republic moving towards disintegration and doom blamed it on the stars:

Modern thinkers broke away completely from both classical and medieval conceptions of authority as derived from a transcendental source. For them the state is something sovereign unto itself fusing

31. Plato, *Republic*, 358c - 359 a.

32. St. Augustine, *The City of God* XIX, c. 23.

33. Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New York & London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), p. 157.

34. *City of God* V, ch. 21 - 26.

both authority and power. For the Romans authority rested in the wisdom and prudence of the judges who maintained their silence until questioned by society. Medieval thought checked political power by authority resident within the very nature and laws of society and ultimately rooted in the authority of God. Power itself was decentralized and distributed among autonomous towns, cities, religious orders and other institutions virtually independent from the imperial power. Fullness of authority and absolute power was ascribed to God alone. Once the link with the Age of Faith was broken the tendency was to treat the human political community as an absolute in itself. Jean Bodin taking the highly centralized government of France for a model states that the grouping of families which forms the basis of society is governed by the highest political power, *summum potestas*, one, absolute and perpetual. It is also sovereign, in such a way that should it lose its sovereignty the republic itself would cease to exist³⁵. According to Hobbes all power resides in the people and they cede it by a voluntary contract to the state.

Perhaps this is not a total departure from the philosophical thought initiated by the Greeks, but a natural sequel to it. Greek thought was impersonal placing the ultimate value and authority in a supreme Good or supreme goal. Even the Scholastics did not disturb this scheme but only affixed the label "God" to that supreme good and goal. When from the sixteenth century the emphasis was shifted from impersonal nature to the conscious subject, the seat of authority too had to be transferred to the community of conscious individuals. For Bodin the state was the "substantial form," the interior principle of growth and specification in the Aristotelian hylemorphic view of things, which quickened the community of conscious men from within. Hence it had to be absolute and unconditioned. Even when monarchy was replaced by democracy the absolute character of authority combined with power did not change: the will of the people was supreme.

But even here many felt the need to set certain limits to political power lest it should degenerate into tyranny. The early solution was that the sovereign should listen carefully to the people and rule according to prevailing customs. But in a liberal mood which discredited a static idea of nature customs and traditions also lost their value.

35. Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, abr. trs. M. J. Tooley (New York : Macmillan, 1955), pp. 22-36; 40-48.

Baron de Montesquieu and the liberalist movement led by him, without questioning the presuppositions of the sovereign state endowed with absolute power, sought to guarantee a sparing use of that Power in the service of a wider distribution of liberty within the framework of the political society. The solution was to limit that power through its separation into three branches of government, legislature, executive and judiciary following Polybius's analysis of the constitution of the Roman Republic³⁶. Polybius had argued that the Romans had locked the three good forms of government into a simultaneous synthesis restricting the tendency of the monarchy to degenerate into tyranny by the senate and the comitium, counterbalancing the aristocracy with consuls and tribunes, and saving democracy from demagoguery by the restraint of the senate and the monarchy of the consuls. Montesquieu found a new expression of this tripartite division of power in the English constitution, according to which the king functioned as the executor of law and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the parliament legislated, and the judiciary was in the hands of the people since the juries were drawn from the people at large.

The Religious Roots of Political Authority

But the attempt of politics to stand all by itself like other sciences created several problems. Politics is not a self-contained system of theoretical information, but a practical science that should provide convincing motivation to command effective obedience and willing compliance with a programme of action for the common good. As Juan Donoso Cortes and other opponents of 19th century liberalism forcefully argued, a political authority that is based on a purely voluntary contract does not have absolute commanding authority. If as a perfect society the state must attain its goal its power should have unity and perpetuity coupled with a certain limitation of power arising out of the hierarchy of persons and institutions that share power in a society. According to Donoso the division of power into the legislative, the executive and the judiciary branches without a mechanism to coordinate them denies the power's unity. "Liberalism denies... perpetuity because it grounds the principle itself in a contract and no power is inviolable if its foundation is variable."³⁷ Only by relating

36. Polybius, *The Histories*, trs. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1927), pp. 6, 11-12.

37. Donoso Cortes quoted in Frederic D. Wilhelmsen *l. c.* p. 162.

the common good of all the people to the ultimate concerns of man can the precepts and laws of the political authority impose obligation on the consciences of people and demand their willing co-operation. The coercive force of the penal law can to a great extent achieve the public observance of laws; but that alone cannot produce the willing co-operation of all towards the common good.

In the Age of Faith absolute power was reserved for the divine authority thus limiting the power of the state. This was easy to achieve when traditional religions had their own more or less separate territories. Europe was Christian and the Church acted as a watchdog lest the temporal authority should go beyond its limited function of achieving the material welfare of the people, at the same time as guaranteeing their freedom to strive towards the attainment of their supernatural goal. The churchman of the Middle Ages proposed the theory of the two swords of the Church and of the State, both perfect societies working for the total welfare of the people. The Church having in view the spiritual and eternal goal of man was authorized to wield the superior power, claiming even a veto over the temporal sword of the state when it came into conflict with man's spiritual interests.

When Hinduism was the prevailing religion of India the kings were very much under the influence of the Brahmin priests, who by right claimed the posts of chief-ministers and judges. The Hindu law books written mostly by Brahmins fulminate dire consequences against those rulers who would dare violate the divine law, and we have stories of sages who by mere word of mouth destroyed powerful kings and their armies. But for Hinduism, the priest and the king did not wield competing swords, but played complementary roles like male and female, husband and wife in the management of a household. Their co-operation was patterned on the governance of the universe by the gods, who were often conceived in pairs: Mitra and Varuna, Agni and Indra, Śiva and Parvati, Vishṇu and Lakshmi. The male was supposed to represent the absolute and unconditioned aspect of the Godhead and the female though in reality identical with the same divinity stood for its manifestation in the created realm; the former stood for authority, the latter for the executive power. The priest stood for the authority of the law, the king for its practical execution.

Wherever Islam gained prominence, Koran became the basic law-book for the state. The institution of Caliphate was created to see to the faithful execution of the Koranic law in the temporal administration

of the people. The Calipha was not a religious authority but a temporal administrator charged with the task of ruling the people according to the laws of Islam. The holy wars against the enemies of faith and the special tax and other penalties imposed on people who wanted to follow other faiths made it abundantly clear that Islam presented the only authentic order of the state in the light of Islamic faith.

Once the uniformity of such religious traditions was broken and several faiths came to exist side by side, the basis for the authority of the state itself came to be questioned. As we have already noted, one approach to the problem was to deny the necessary link with the absolute power of God, and to release that power here on earth extending it to some sort of a simulacrum of a God. Power was secularized and its relation to any sort of authority human or divine was denied. State power itself was not often conceived as an entity but as an order of things. The religious concerns and values of people were taken care of through customs and traditions and private initiatives of groups and individuals. Since the service rendered by the state were rather limited there were not many actual conflicts between religion and politics. Sometimes attempts were made to apply the post-Reformation principle "*cujus regio, ejus religio*", namely, that the government of a country would determine its religion and that it would require all inhabitants to conform to it. Still, in most countries, even in those with formal religious establishments maintained by the state, a great degree of religious liberty was allowed.

Welfare State, Pluralism and Neutrality

But modern governments have vastly expanded their services to the people embracing a number of fields formerly taken care of by religions such as education, health care, support of the poor, and regulation of marriage and family, which often touch the deepest religious concerns of man. When this has to be done in a pluralistic situation of beliefs, politics often clashes with religion. Here a policy of neutrality is imposed on the state by the necessity of creating a social environment protected by law in which men of differing faiths may live together in peace. When people of different faiths shared the same moral convictions like Catholics, Protestants and Jews, enacting and executing public policy in the different areas that affect the deeper concerns of man was relatively easy. But at all times and every where there were

people who did not care for religious values. Today their number has greatly increased. The religions themselves come from radically different socio-cultural and historical contexts.

In this situation the avowed policy of the liberal state is neutrality: Liberal government is neutral government, which aims only at equal liberty for all under impartial laws, leaving the use of that liberty and the pursuit of goals to individuals. Any attempt by the state to make decisions about values and goals is interpreted as the effort of some citizens to impose their conception of excellence, virtue or happiness on others. Indeed, a pluralistic society must strive to be neutral about many things. But it cannot be neutral about all issues. When fundamental values are involved such assumed neutrality can be an illusory and self-defeating policy.

In a modern society the individual needs a basic education, a place to live in and a job to earn an income, and a government has to act vigorously on these fronts to promote people's welfare. This necessarily implies some conception of what is good for human beings and what is bad for them. To assume neutrality regarding basic values will amount to subscribing to a sectarian ideology. Normlessness itself is a norm, and its name is libertarianism, which in its extreme form holds that there should be no social norms enforced by the state; if a state were to assume such neutrality there would not be any state at all. Indeed regulation is necessary, as most liberals would agree since it is needed to guarantee the individual's freedom to shape his life as he will.

Similarly if the state maintained neutrality regarding values in education taking the position that the task of public education was solely to impart skills and factual information, this would be subscribing to a particular, sectarian and much controverted theory of knowledge known as positivism. Such a policy would also be practically impossible, since schools do actually teach several value-loaded subjects like sex, history, citizenship, law and literature. To pretend neutrality regarding the legitimacy of abortion will be either assuming that the foetus has no human life, or giving the mother absolute authority over life and death. A government cannot be neutral regarding marriage, which is a highly visible social act, since marriage and the family constitute the foundation of society itself. The welfare state today assumes as a principle that it is unjust to allow

the rich and the middle class to do what the poor cannot afford to do. So when it pretends neutrality regarding the legitimacy of contraception, abortion, divorce and the like, these become constitutional rights, for the securing of which those who cannot afford these by their own resources have to be subsidized by the state. Thus what is excluded from the purview of the state in the name of neutrality actually becomes an object of government policy!

Collaboration of Religion and State

Today politics cannot withdraw from basic human values. There is no neat line of demarcation between political issues and moral issues, nor between religion and morality. The ideal of the "secular" state, and of the separation between church and state means only that the state should not patronize any particular religion. Politics cannot be indifferent to the basic religious values of man.

The policy to be followed when a state has to govern a people divided into different religious groups was outlined by Asoka, the Buddhist emperor, who ruled India in the 3rd century B.C., when the people were sharply divided between Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions. As is clear from the edicts of the emperor, on the one hand he declared that he would rule the people not with the sword but through *Dharma*, a word which stood for moral values and religion. On the other hand he asked the followers of different religions to stress more their unity in basic values than their particular differences and through dialogue to learn from each other. Also, today, only through an ongoing dialogue can religions and ideologies reach an agreement regarding the basic human values, in the light of which alone can the state work for the real good of the people.