

EDITORIAL

Today political institutions are facing a crisis, and religion which was the mainstay and guarantor of political authority in the past is not helping very much in facing the situation. While political authority is fast losing its credibility, religious fundamentalism is trying to usurp political power. What is the right relationship between religion and politics? In this issue of *Dharma* we wish to focus attention on this problem.

In this century a great number of countries were able to shake off the shackles of colonialism and gain political independence. But a great number of them fell right back into a worse servitude under various forms of dictatorship. Though colonialism in its crude form has ceased, it still continues in a more subtle way as cultural and economic bondage to the old colonial powers, which will not voluntarily surrender their superiority and higher standard of living supporting themselves by the poverty of the exploited nations. Religion which in the past justified slavery and colonial conquests is not raising any strong protests against these forms of established injustice because it finds security in the status quo as the least of many possible evils.

But even the democratic countries do not enjoy any secure peace in politics. Perhaps democracy is cracking up today because of its own inner contradictions. The welfare state that took over from religion the various educational, social and humanitarian services for the people finds itself unable to raise enough funds to pay for those services. Most free countries are groaning under huge national debts. Besides, getting elected to public offices has become so arduous and expensive that immediately after assuming office the persons are more concerned with paying off their already contracted political debts and with making preparations for winning the next election than with conscientiously fulfilling the duties of their office and providing a healthy government to the people. Corruption and scandal, in high places have become quite common in democracies. Bribery has become a way of life, and for political parties the main target is to build up large funds through all possible ways to face the next elections.

The authority of the state itself is in question today. The state which got emancipated from all authority, both human and divine, naturally finds it difficult to justify its own authority. So either it makes politics a sort of civil religion presenting the state as a simulacrum of God, or it assumes the liberalist philosophy and a neutral position concerning moral and religious issues making itself more and more irrelevant and unnecessary. Dictatorship and anarchy are the two extremes between which modern democracy is swinging. The only way of escape for political authority from these extremes is to recover the religious roots of its own authority and maintain a sense of the authentic values of human life.

On the other hand, religion itself has become a serious threat to politics today. If in some countries the state has assumed religious authority and the absolute power of God, there are several other countries where the religious authorities are wielding the temporal sword. There is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism by which many people dream of a past golden age when supposedly God and his religious representatives governed all temporal matters directly. This is particularly dangerous since knowledge of religious matters does not provide competence in the temporal affairs of people. The words of Lord Acton, "All power corrupts, absolute power absolutely corrupts" were not uttered about political power but about ecclesiastical authority.

The limited space of this number does not allow us to discuss these difficult issues with any thoroughness. The various articles here presented only draw attention to the many issues involved.

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