

RE-BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD

THE world in which we live and the social order which regulates its movements has for some time been passing through a crisis, a period of transition. We cannot see into the future, and we know not what it may bring. But we are aware that every change implies a passing-away and a coming-to-be, a re-birth following on death which is its price. Only the divine Nature is exempt from the invariable law of change or destruction leading either to the building up of a new life or the falling away into decay by disintegration. Yet God in His goodness has as it were placed limits on His omnipotence and will by not suffering His creatures to be annihilated. Every variation is therefore based on a permanent structure which is itself eternal and unchangeable.

In human nature, whatever modifications a man may undergo, the spiritual element of necessity dominates the material, since in his composite being the soul is created to rule the body. Similarly when the spirit is elevated to the supernatural plane it will by divine ordination and of necessity supersede the purely natural and temporal. The supreme application of this principle, and indeed a reflection in time of the eternal mind of God, is found in the God-man. Here in this most wonderful of mysteries a human nature was made to be the instrument at hand of the Divine Person of the Son.

That which God the Father realized in the Person of His Son He intended in like manner to be accomplished in every Christian. For in being incorporated by baptism into the Mystical Body, the Church, of which the head is the living Christ, each is become a partaker of the divine nature and life. That which is accomplished in each living member must similarly be effected in the body politic, which is the Christian commonwealth.

In ideal conditions of civilization the Church and State are an undivided alliance constituting, so to say, an ethical whole which is the City of God. The dwellers of the City

are at once citizens pertaining to both societies between which should exist an orderly connection. Pope Leo XIII, following the Fathers and St. Thomas, has taught that this relationship may be not improperly compared 'to the union which binds together the soul and body in the case of man,' but adds that 'each in its kind is supreme.'¹

The erroneous doctrines of the separatists and of the totalitarian State as an absolute closely resemble and have an affinity to the Christological heresies of Nestorius and the Monophysites, inasmuch as they are destructive of a hypostatic union and refuse to acknowledge the primacy of the spiritual.

St. Thomas Aquinas, borrowing the thought of Aristotle, clearly shows that the exigencies of man's nature demand that he live in society, 'since it belongs to man by nature to live in a group, because if he remains a solitary he is not self-sufficient for necessities of life, it follows that the more perfect society or commune is that which is the most self-sufficing for the acquiring of the necessities of life.'² A man who withholds himself from the society of his fellows is inhuman, and may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts.³ The social unity according to the Aristotelian concept is the city State. It comes into being only when a group of families is large enough to be self-sufficient. Likewise in the view of St. Thomas the perfect human community is the city State, not the land at large. First and foremost a city is not a place, but a society of human beings, a personal aggregate. The city then is a creation of nature, and cannot be essentially evil. It is, nevertheless, misleading, and a travesty of St. Thomas to attribute to him the saying: 'The State is a perfect community.' There seems little justification for translating *civitas* by the term State in the modern sense, just as we cannot properly apply it without qualifications to our modern in-

¹ Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, Nov. 1, 1885, n. 26.

² *De regimine principum*, Book I, ch. 1.

³ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, ch. 1.

dustrial centres. Neither Aristotle nor St. Thomas were contemplating a nation and still less an empire in the modern sense, and they would have regarded a country which is not self-sufficient as an anomaly. But as early forms of society are natural, so too is the single and complete community of several villages which constitutes the city State. The greater or less number of single entities which are incorporated by association does not change the nature of the organization, though it may involve a change in the form of government.

The purpose of the human organization called civil society is to supplement the insufficiencies of the individual and the family. This it is intended to do by liberating and protecting their temporal rights to felicity and prosperity in common.

In so far as it is able to do this it is the most perfect natural community. The proximate aim, then, of the body politic is to guarantee the corporate welfare and safety of the citizens as a predisposition for their spiritual and supernatural life in Christ. The welfare and security of society depends on the maintenance of its unity by peace. For there is no *raison d'être* of social life unless there is the safety of peace, because a people at strife is become a burden to itself. Peace in man is a perfect balance of interaction between body and soul resulting from a proper control of the senses by reason. The healing grace of God alone will re-establish natural harmony and repose within the human organism in its fallen state, by subjection of the mind to God through faith and supernatural love. 'Peace,' says St. Augustine, 'between mortal man and God is a regulated obedience in faith under the divine law'⁴ without which man cannot be at peace with himself. The gift of peace, a property of charity, which Christ our Lord came into the world to bestow comes only to men of good will. And peace in God's terrestrial City should spring from the souls of citizens living in concord by obedience to authority, for in the words again of St. Augustine, 'the

⁴ *De Civ. Dei*, Book XIX, ch. 13.

peace of the city is the regulated harmony of the citizens who are governed and obey.'

Doubtless for a time necessity or restraint may quell social unrest by driving it below the surface, but true and lasting peace is more than a temporary freedom from outward turmoil. Primarily it is an inward spirit which finds expression in an exterior tranquillity. The only reliable and permanent bond of peace among men is a constant mutual charity radiating from the love of God as the centre. Thus only amidst diversity of opinions can the wills of the masses be made to harmonize.

The temporal City of God is but the antechamber of the heavenly court, and 'even the Heavenly City in its earthly pilgrimage makes use of terrestrial peace . . . the reflection of celestial peace which is so truly peace that creatures endowed with reason can be said to possess peace only in that most orderly and harmonious society in which God is enjoyed and each one in God.'⁵ In the mind of St. Augustine the City of God is not identified with the visible Church, but it is rather God's invisible kingdom in heaven and on earth of which the visible Church is a living landmark on the borders of Time and Eternity.

A truly Christian State should spontaneously seek after Christian ends, and when it fails in this regard it begins rapidly to crumble and to fall. It is easy, therefore, to understand how in ages of faith one who openly repudiated the very principles upon which the State rested should be held guilty of treason and regarded as a menace to the social structure. Sin itself is more than a personal calamity; it is a social evil that wounds and calls for a general judgment. A contagious and virulent pestilence cannot be tolerated but only cauterized and stamped out. Christendom of the Middle Ages may not have been such a paradise of delights as some medievalists would almost seem to suppose; it did at least present a united front, and despite numerous political divisions was a greater unity than modern Europe broken into nations.

⁵ St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, Book XIX, ch. 13.

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Clearly there can be no Christian commonwealth, except perhaps in external appearances, unless its builders are believers in the redemptive love of God which by omnipotence has united the infinitely distant, the human and divine. The work of the Incarnation, completed by the Holy Spirit, is to make the members of the human race one in Christ so that they are endowed with a dual citizenship and are under the obligation of a twofold patriotism. In this mortal life man must needs live his civic life in concord with his fellows within the Christian commune. But Christ our Lord came into the world to make all things new, not merely to found a Church, but to establish a kingdom. Having the fulness of grace and knowledge He received from His heavenly Father a human sovereignty by which to reign over both spiritual and temporal affairs. Christ as King in His own right is the fount of all authority and has been given the power to judge. At the price of sacrifice the whole of human life is the purchased property of God through Jesus Christ, and 'all things have been subjected under His feet.'⁶ The one Mediator between God and the people by the union in Himself of the human and divine has brought into being a new alliance between the spiritual and temporal powers. Henceforth the Church and State whilst remaining still distinct are never to be rightly separated, since together they constitute the social life of the saints in this world.

Christ our King enthroned at the summit of hierarchical authority has thought well to communicate His powers to His vicegerents within the ecclesiastical and civil domains. According to the present divine economy neither the Church alone nor the State alone can make provision for the total well-being of redeemed man called to Christian fellowship.

A political *régime* gives direction to organized society, and implies a relationship between the associates which is based on one complete and ultimate purpose. Individual responsibility, however, cannot be submerged in the multi-

⁶ Hebrews, II, 8.

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tude nor does the mustering of human forces intrinsically modify individual effort. Consequently every act which is of its nature good or bad in the moral order retains its moral goodness or badness whether it is done through the body politic by many or by the few independently. From the principle the conclusion follows that the end of the human multitude must be the same as that of the individual man within the association. In moral conduct there cannot be any real distinction between man as a citizen and as a private individual. Pope Leo XIII has already taught that it is not lawful to follow one line of conduct in private and another in public, respecting privately the authority of the Church, but publicly rejecting it. Both in his public and his private capacity a Catholic citizen always owes a twofold allegiance to the heavenly and earthly kingdom which should be an ethical unity as well as an organic unit.

Further, the citizen should be endowed with the requisite qualities for citizenship not primarily as a citizen but as a man. Only the good man makes the good citizen who can contribute by his abilities to the common cause of society. Moreover, the statesman or ruler must be characterized by practical wisdom. But modern States are mainly concerned with the good citizen in preference to the good man.

By reason of their respective aims and their activities within determined limits the two societies the Church and the State are distinct whilst they are intended to collaborate in providing the whole man with his temporal and spiritual needs. The proper function of the civil institution is to further the common good of its citizens in temporal affairs, but sacred things, or 'whatever belongs either of its nature or by reason of the end to which it is referred, to the salvation of the souls, or to the worship of God, is subject to the power and judgment of the Church.'¹

St. Thomas tells us that the object men have in associating is to live a good life together. This aim embraces

¹ *Immortale Dei.*

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the whole economic life but includes also the virtuous life. A good life is a virtuous life and the highest common good. The springs of life are the moral virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, each as it were coloured by religion. For the virtue of religion gives focus to the other virtues and enables man to offer to God in return for His gracious gifts the sacrifice of himself and his reasonable service. The end of the terrestrial State, though it is a temporal good, is nevertheless chiefly of the spiritual and moral order.

Although there is a multiplicity of elements which conspire to the formation of a human being, man remains essentially one precisely because he is a living person. As a person he enjoys the dignity of an indivisible whole, and there is deep down in his nature an innate craving for finality, for something that will gratify and set at rest every desire and bring with it abiding happiness and repose. This driving power is behind every human endeavour and colours even the smallest aim with an attractive goodness, and behind it as a counterpart lies the great reality of God, the final destiny of man. Even by combination therefore there cannot be two destinies equally final, but one is necessarily subordinate to the other, as a conveyance is subordinate to the destination to which it leads.

By the exigencies of his nature man is constrained to journey in this mortal life towards the portals of death behind which is everlasting life, for the greater portion of the City of God is lifted into eternity beyond the limits of space and time. The number of souls who have already traversed this path is far in excess of those yet on the way and many are still at the cross-roads, but their pilgrimage is heavenwards. St. Thomas therefore concludes that 'the virtuous life is not the final destiny of the associated multitude but by virtuous living to attain to the enjoyment of the Godhead.'⁸

Because the very purpose of the present life in the world is the supernatural happiness of heaven, it is the solemn

⁸ *De regimine principum*, Book I, ch. 14.

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responsibility of the ruler to make the lives of the masses conducive to their final destiny. Laws will be passed that will lead to attainment of this lofty end and will as far as possible proscribe the opposite. Consequent on rationalism, paganism and heresy, the supernatural ideal has almost faded from the minds of both rulers and subjects. There is a growing tendency to acquiesce in forms of government and legislation which prescind entirely from all consideration of a future life or which are detrimental to its vital principles. Too often it happens that statesmen are preoccupied with providing inoffensive palliatives for moral degradation rather than seeking to apply a remedy to the root of the disease. In these circumstances it is extremely difficult for even the Catholic conscience not to lose much of its sensitiveness.

Only one saving remedy remains, and that is to revert to the principles preached by God-Incarnate, allowing them to penetrate every department of life. In truth this is the time to rise from sleep and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. In private life conduct must be made conformable with the Gospel precepts, even when great sacrifice is demanded by Christian virtue. But it is likewise of great moment that Catholics should help shoulder the common burden by becoming more active promoters of true public welfare, not in sheltered retreats but in the open. There are opportunities for taking a more active part in administration and for exercising a more direct influence in bringing about effectual measures for the well-being of a Christian State as befits a Christian people.

But external re-adjustments cannot succeed in bringing order out of the present social chaos. The great need of present times is the spiritual transformation which is implied in the unrestricted recognition of the living and undivided Christ in His head and living members which together are His fulness. The re-building of a new Christendom requires a social as well as an individual unqualified acceptance of Christianity in its entirety, and the City of God must no longer be profaned by remaining

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a temple of dumb idols. But without co-ordinate action there can be no social re-construction, nor can there be any co-ordinate Christian action independent of co-ordinate Christian thought. The Eternal Word, the personification of God's thought, has entered into society to pierce with His divine light the minds of men. But 'the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.' Christ our Lord has yet to become the governing Soul and the directing Mind of Society whereby it may receive power to restore all things in Him.

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