

## CHURCH AND STATE IN EUROPE

BY his study of the contemporary relations between Church and State on the continent of Europe<sup>1</sup> Dr. Adolf Keller has deserved well not only of his co-religionists but of all those who are vitally interested in the present phase of the perennial struggle between Christianity and the powers of this world. Naturally, his view of the solution of these problems does not coincide with the Catholic view, but it certainly shows a realization of the need for greater unity, on which Catholics insist, and his analysis of the actual situation and presentation of the facts are of the greatest value to those of our Faith who are endeavouring to understand the situation and contribute towards its improvement. It is therefore the object of the present article to make a rapid survey of the problem in the light mainly of Dr. Keller's evidence and to give some indication of the probable outcome of contemporary events in this sphere.

The constitution of the Church is divine and remains fixed and permanent, that of the State is human and based on contingent needs which vary from age to age. It follows that the relation between Church and State will not change through any development of the former but only through the different attitude which the State takes up with regard to the Church's claims. In the light of her long experience and aided by the guidance of the Holy Ghost, the Church will adopt different methods according to the changing needs of time and place in order to fulfil her age-old task of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth and to bring supernatural life to the members of States which fail to recognize a law higher than the natural and often even offend against the latter.

It is very suitable therefore that Dr. Keller should commence his book with a long chapter on the nature of the modern European State. He insists on a fact which we have scarcely yet realized in England, namely that the modern

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<sup>1</sup> *Church and State on the European Continent*, by Adolf Keller, D.D., LL.D. (Epworth Press, 1936; 6/-.)

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State is the outcome of revolution and is even now uncertain of itself and insecure in the midst of a rapidly changing world. The same point was strikingly made nearly two years ago by Dr. Hugo F. Simon in his excellent book *Revolution—Whither Bound?* There we are reminded, "We have passed through about twenty-four great fundamental revolutions in the last eighteen years: two in Russia, two in Germany, two in Italy, four in Spain, two in Hungary, at least four in Austria, one in Poland, at least three in Greece, one in Turkey, one in Yugo-Slavia, one in Japan, and one completely peaceful and legal, but none the less fundamental, in the United States."<sup>2</sup>

In times of revolution authority is strengthened. Those who wield it become much stricter in the exercise of their power, since concessions of liberty are much more liable to abuse during these times; and the people themselves recognize that they can only be secure by the acceptance of a stricter supervision over their activities and by forming themselves into a unity behind a trusted leader. Liberty is readily sacrificed for the sake of the more fundamental and primitive human needs, the assurance of continued life by the State's provision of food for the individual, and defence against internal and external enemies for the community. The nineteenth century democratic ideal is everywhere at a discount, openly rejected by the Fascist and Bolshevist States and rapidly disappearing even in those States where the old forms persist. Everywhere there is a movement towards closer unity between society and the State, a closer bond between the members of society with regard to one another and to the authoritarian government (the latter usually personified in the form of an individual dictator).

The State which emerges is at once aggressively secular and yet, in a certain fashion, spiritual. It is this secular character which creates and embitters the conflict of the modern State with a Church which is never wholly of this world; but the spiritual forces which are manifested in it are the strongest ground of hope for a happy outcome of the conflict.

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<sup>2</sup> P. 2 (published by Farrar and Rinehart, New York, 1935).

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Secularism is perhaps the only characteristic which the new State has taken over from despised Liberalism. The leaders have seen and appreciated the political and economic evils which were the result of Liberalism but they have not been elevated to an appreciation of the supernatural order; rationalism is rejected in politics but still determines the attitude of the dictators towards religion.<sup>3</sup> The middle classes who created the Liberal State lost heavily in the war and look to the new administrations to provide their material welfare. They retain their old negative outlook on religion and are too concerned with their material needs to attend to supernatural claims. The masses, exploited and dehumanized by Liberal economy, look also to the new State for the satisfaction of their material needs and for the reassurance of their natural rights. But not until they are restored to their proper human dignity can they begin to appreciate the dignity of the sonship of God.

In the midst of revolution all classes are looking for political salvation and economic security from a State to which they readily concede an authority immeasurably greater than it has at any time exercised in the past. They look for the assurance of this world's values, have no time for the higher needs of man, and the State which is established as a result of their demands remains both in its authority and in the members who compose it a purely secular reality.

But the secular state is the effect of spiritual forces and by a mysterious and perhaps not wholly diabolical paradox has itself a certain spiritual aspect. "The *State* itself has become a myth," says Dr. Keller (p. 57). The indifferent, aloof and neutral Liberal State could not attract the spiritual in man; yet it could not wholly destroy it. It deprived him of the supernatural, turned him away from genuine religion, with the result that he had to find the satisfaction of his religious

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<sup>3</sup> It is an interesting fact that the leading supporters of the Nazi party in Austria belong to the professional classes who were formerly the chief strength of Liberalism. There are certainly differences between the attitudes of a Mussolini, a Hitler and a Stalin, and the first-named seems to be closer than the others to a proper appreciation of religion; but even Mussolini is still inclined to make religion subordinate to politics—the Italian State is secular in spite of the fervour of its Catholic supporters.

and spiritual exigencies in the political sphere. This ultimately is the reason for the existence of the modern Totalitarian State, Fascist, Bolshevist or Nazi. Whatever brutality, intrigue and fraud have been used to establish the new powers, they could not possibly have remained in existence if it had not been for the driving force of the spirituality of a people merged into a new unity, intent on the pursuit of a new hope. The strange self-accusations and seemingly religious hysteria of the Moscow criminals of recent times manifest this new religion in what is perhaps its most perverted form. Healthier is the admiration for the Stakhanovite workers in Soviet Russia on account of their achievements for the Socialist State; and there is much that is positively admirable in the genuine popularity of Stalin, Mussolini or Hitler. This latter seems to indicate the rediscovery of personality and the realization that individuality is only one aspect and that the least important of this supremely spiritual reality.

This secular State which provides at once for the elementary material and spiritual needs of man is in obvious and direct opposition to the Church, which claims control over every human action in so far as it has a moral aspect—*sub specie peccati*—and exclusive control over the higher actions of man. This claim is disputed by the modern State, disputed with a ferocity unparalleled in history. In the Middle Ages, the theory of the Church as the higher power with authority in temporal affairs *sub specie peccati* was readily conceded; conflict arose when in practice the State claimed that certain matters had no spiritual aspect and so were entirely under its control. To-day the State goes much further and claims a position of superiority which appears as a distorted reflection of that which was held by the mediæval Church. The State is regarded as the superior society, with the higher end. The Church is expected to serve this end, to teach the doctrine of loyalty to the State and to the accepted political philosophy as a religious duty. The State will not interfere with the administration of the purely ecclesiastical and spiritual affairs, any more than the mediæval Church interfered in the strictly political sphere. But just as the Church interfered

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with the actions of the State's subjects from the point of view of sin and claimed to decide whether there was a spiritual aspect in question, so the modern State claims to have power in Church affairs when politics are involved and to be itself the judge as to whether this is the case. There has been at work a process which reversed the mediæval order: "The power of the State had continuously grown, and reached, during the World War, a summit and a kind of omnipotence which can be compared only with the supremacy of the Church in the thirteenth century. Once more the wheel of time had swung round."<sup>4</sup>

The above description is not of course completely accurate. The Soviet State does not consider the Church at all, because it does not recognize the existence of the spiritual or supernatural which is the Church's proper sphere. On the other hand Italian Fascism does not attempt to assert a *jus circa sacra*, even though it sometimes seems to make the State superior to the Church. But National-Socialism takes up almost exactly the above-described attitude; that is the fundamental reason for the struggle in Germany—even more than the blood and race theories of the Nazis. "The 'Christian religion' has . . . a very definite and recognized place in the ideology of National Socialism," but its place is that of an auxiliary to the State.<sup>5</sup> The Church is not content to be a mere auxiliary in the pursuit of an end inferior when not positively opposed to its own; the National Socialist State cannot, without abandoning its whole philosophy, submit to the Church's supremacy even in matters of morality. Hence the conflict.

Against these new and overweening claims, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches have courageously protested, even to the point of martyrdom, and have been brought into a closer unity in face of a common enemy. Individually, only the Catholic Church is in a position to counter the organization of the State with a powerful organization of its own and to enter into agreements as one moral personality with another. The complete subordination of the

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<sup>4</sup> Keller, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Keller, p. 124; cf. p. 125.

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Orthodox Church to the Russian State and its inner divisions rendered it helpless in face of the Bolshevist revolution. The spiritual power which remained within it bore fruit chiefly in martyrdoms, but the fierce opposition of the new State and its own lack of organization as an independent society made it impossible to come to any agreement. The Protestant Churches were of less importance in Russia, but in Germany they too were hampered by their long-standing association with the State and by their inner divisions; now they are organizing themselves in defence of their spiritual claims and endeavouring to create a more intense unity amongst themselves and to appreciate the teaching of the Catholic Church, the supreme example of ecclesiastical unity. The Catholic Church herself protests, with all the greater effect in that she is an international force whose power is respected by other States, against the intrusions of the political leaders. But she too is sometimes reduced to martyrdom—or should one say glorified through the heroic deaths of her children?

Martyrdom is one expression of the present-day relations between Church and State, and Dr. Keller rightly insists on the importance of this vicarious suffering for the benefit of weaker brethren in those States where the issue is not so acute. But the value of martyrdom, working by way of intercession more than example, is so much a matter of the spiritual order that it cannot properly be estimated in the present study.

It has been pointed out that the relations between Church and State can be regulated by means of agreements between the two parties, viewed as moral personalities, and that these are most effectively drawn up between the Catholic Church with its elaborate legal system and the State. But even concordats are of little value in the eyes of a State for which "Law is what serves the community."<sup>6</sup> This again is the position in Germany, where any legal agreement may be rejected which is viewed by the State as inconsistent with the present interests of the people. Granted that unity between the Churches is a valuable source of strength in the present

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<sup>6</sup> Keller, p. 119.

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troubles, it seems that little result can be expected from agreements established between such a unified Christianity on the one hand and the modern State on the other.

Even less helpful are political parties. The modern State rejects the party-system and tends more and more to become the single-party organism or even to abandon any form of party organization. A Christian political party could, in the old State, work according to accepted methods for the defence of the Church as against the claims of the State; in the greater part of contemporary Europe all political parties other than the one in power are suppressed, and there is little likelihood of their revival.

It is painfully clear to Catholics and it is rapidly becoming more obvious to others who claim to be Christians that religious unity is fundamental, and this not through attempts to agree on a least common multiple of beliefs but through a return to the mind of Christ. In their relations with the modern State, Karl Barth has suggested, Christians should try to understand what Christ's attitude would be and to act accordingly in unity. And Dr. Keller (p. 365) says that "the task of the Œcumenical Movement is not to form clever diplomatic formulæ for rendering possible a superficial union, but to seek, in common, the way which leads from our Churches and theologies and confessions of faith to Christ Himself." That return, we know, can only be complete when it is by way of the Catholic Church, through the unity of the Visible Body to solidarity with the Head.

The usual paths of conversion are open and many are taking them, but after conversion Christians have still to face the problem of the relations of the one Church with the modern State. How is the Catholic Church with her members to carry on her task of bringing men to Christ in the modern State, secularized as it is and estranged from all religion?

It has already been pointed out that the new governments, however autocratic and dictatorial they may seem, are dependent on the will of the people, and the whole organism, government and people, presents a greater unity than could ever be seen in the Liberal State. It follows that the Church

can achieve the greatest results by identifying herself more with the masses of the people; in that way she will bring individuals to Christ and, gradually, de-secularize the State which is built up on the will of the people. She will be more capable of defending her claims against the State when the people who build it up are inspired by Christian principles and are loyal members of the Church. By identifying herself with the people, the Church will win converts and thus strengthen herself at the very moment when she is in the midst of the struggle.

By the Church is meant of course all her members, but in the first place it is the priest who is called upon to perform this task. Not without justification have the clergy been regarded as identifying themselves with the interests of the rich and powerful and as indifferent or even hostile to the welfare of the poor. That was notoriously the situation in the older Russia, but it was also unfortunately true of many of the Catholic clergy in European countries. The martyrdom of the Spanish priests may be regarded as an atonement for past neglect, which goes a long way to explain even though it cannot justify the present hostility. In another Catholic country, the poor are so embittered that they refuse to accept alms distributed by the clergy. There have been exceptions indeed and there are to-day large numbers of priests doing heroic work in winning the poor back to God. There was long before the war a Sonnenschein giving his life to the abandoned and half-human poor of the Berlin slums, there is to-day in Vienna a priest doing similar work with an energy and zeal which astounds all who know him, and it would ill become us to judge adversely the work of the priests in our own industrial centres. But a much greater effort can and must be made if England or any other country is to be brought back to the love of Christ. Christ must appear among these people as the carpenter of Nazareth or as the crucified and tortured Criminal of Calvary to be recognized and to win their love.

The priestly apostolate is only part of a great movement which demands the co-operation also of the laity. This lay-apostolate under the direction of the hierarchy is not a new

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thing, but the genius of Pope Pius XI, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, has given to it an organization and a method suited to the needs of our own time. This is the meaning of Catholic Action and its task is precisely the spiritualization of the masses.

Inevitably converts are gained by this movement and the unity of the Church made more obvious. Against the organized and powerful State it presents a united and organized group rendering strict obedience to the commands of the hierarchy, limits the encroachments of the State and is able to make known the Church's views and win support for them. But its principal work is hidden and its value cannot be estimated.

By contact, by conversation, by whatever method is found appropriate by the apostle and approved by the Bishops, the grace of Christ is directed to the souls who need it. Touched by this grace souls are brought into the Catholic Church or back to their religious duties, are led to co-operate in the work of Catholic Action and—trained themselves by the educational institutions of the movement—are even able to enter into political life and direct the State in a manner more in accordance with the will of God and the rights of the Church. The great mass of the people, not quickly indeed but in God's own time, begin to rise to the conception of spiritual realities and gradually to demand that the State of which they are members should respect in its actions the spiritual and supernatural claims of the Church. This process will not work out easily and it will never be completely successful since man inevitably fails from time to time and nowhere more signally than in the political sphere. But that is the way we must take to attain the final triumph of Christ's Church over the secular State.

The newest revolutions which have led to the establishment of the new State are the sign of a reawakened spirituality in the masses of the people. They have recognized the spiritual in man's nature, it cannot be long before they recognize his need of that religion which is connatural to him and for which his whole soul yearns.

EDWARD QUINN.