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Protestantism and the State.

IT is of great importance to clear thinking that we should distinguish between three categories that are often confused—nationalism, the nation, and the state.

Nationalism, in my mind, stands for the cult of the nation exalted into an end in itself, a mystical ultimate of blood and race and soil. Nationality is another matter. The nation has a God-given function in human life.

By "nation" I mean—well, what ought I to mean? For nation is in fact one of the most difficult things to define. I shall play for safety by accepting the guidance of Sir Ernest Barker in a region where few have better rights, and quote from him the best definition I know (*Christianity and Nationality*, Burge Lecture, p. 15).

> "A nation is not a physical fact or racial group. Racially all nations are composite and heterogeneous: they are composed of different stocks and breeds; and it is not in virtue of any physical factor of common blood that the unity and identity of a nation may be vindicated. Nor again is a nation a political structure. It may be that in part; but it must always be something more than that before it can be dignified by the name of nation. Neither a physical fact of common blood, nor a political structure of common law and order, a nation is essentially a spiritual society. It is what it is in virtue of a common mental substance resident in the minds of all its members—common memories of the past, common ideas in the present, common hopes for the future, and, above all, a common and general will issuing from the common substance of memories, ideas and hopes."

The nation, again, must not be identified with the state. By "state" I mean the politically organised community, the unit of governing power, the authority with the power of life and death and property, taxation, and conscription—whether it be monarchy, republic or oligarchy, dictatorship or democracy, or what you will. The state is the arbiter of rights and duties.

The issue of Church and state is in essence as old as human history, but in our generation it has acquired a quite new urgency. Not only Protestantism, but all spiritual values, are threatened when the state claims supreme and complete authority over its citizens. A growing secularisation of outlook has coincided with a growing centralisation and complexity of communal life, at once

required by and made possible by the application of modern scientific techniques. In what we have come to call the totalitarian state, human life in all its aspects is totally subordinated to the political power. Man is treated as if he existed only to obey and serve the state.

We saw it at its worst in the Nazi State, but it is not only in Germany that totalitarianism has its votaries, nor is it an altogether new phenomenon. We need to call a halt and cry a warning whenever there is a tendency to make the family, the school, the university, or the Church, subordinate to the ends of the political state. The state started life as a policeman, but, like Poohbah, it has tended to accumulate offices. It has become nurse, schoolmaster, employer, doctor, insurance agent, and I know not what. Much of this is perhaps inevitable and even desirable. But it is dangerous. Poohbah may become a jealous and intolerant deity. Man is more than a citizen: he is an immortal soul. He will still count when the state, of which for a short time he was a subject, is one with Nineveh and Tyre. The state should be the servant of the spirit. Man's chief end is not to glorify the state, but to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.

Let us go back into history to try and understand the issues. The Roman Empire was a single political structure and universal so far as the then largely isolated European and Mediterranean world was concerned. From the days of Constantine onwards Church and state were not two societies, but two aspects of one society, and Emperors and Popes were rival authorities within it. Those who did not come within this area of Christendom—Jews, Moslems, pagans—were deemed not to exist by this tidy medieval theory. They had no real right to be there at all. Of course the theory never really fitted the facts inside Christendom. It proved impossible to define the respective spheres of Pope and Emperor. It would have been difficult enough as between saints—and to sainthood Emperors, or indeed Popes, seldom aspired. Ambitious Emperors tried to rule Popes, and ambitious Popes tried to rule Emperors, and the tide of battle fluctuated. Charlemagne, I suppose, was a signal instance of the ascendancy of the Emperor, and Hildebrand, Gregory VII, of the triumphant Pope.

Protestantism is of course, the fruit of the break of the Western Church occasioned by the Reformation in the sixteenth century. This tremendous upheaval had consequences for the whole structure of society that can be compared only with those of a modern world war. It transformed the world, not only ecclesiastically, but also politically and socially; it spelled the doom of medieval culture. The forces that produced the explosion were long in gathering. There were Protestants long before the

Reformation. And the causes, like the results, were very mixed: social political and religious streams flowed together in accumulating volume that at last burst the banks. Among these streams was the growing consciousness of nationality, so that the empire was becoming progressively less imperial. The time came when the Pope was confronted not by one Emperor, but by many kings, each representing his own nation. The historic problem of Church and state entered a new phase at the Reformation by reason of political as well as religious developments.

There is no one Protestant view of the relations between Church, state and nation. We need to distinguish three main lines of Protestant theory and practice. There is Martin Luther, from whom sprang the Church in Germany and the Churches in Scandinavia. There is John Calvin, the founder of the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition in many lands. From him Scottish religion has drawn its inspiration, and from him also largely derive the English Free Churches and their world-wide expressions. Thirdly, and in a place by itself, is Anglicanism, a monument to the English genius for compromise, drawing impartially from the old pre-Reformation tradition and from the newer impulses of Calvinism. I propose to look at these in turn and then at the end to offer some positive judgements on the whole issue.

1. Lutheranism and the German Church

Luther was on many counts a very great man ,and it is important that those who feel compelled to criticise some aspects of his teaching and influence should not lose their sense of proportion. Here we are concerned only with what Luther did about Church and state. Luther's true greatness lay in his re-assertion of the spiritual liberty of the Christian man, and his unshakeable stand for what he believed to be the truth. It was only by force of circumstances that he became an ecclesiastic and a politician.

When the formation of a separate Evangelical Church became necessary, Luther had high ideals as to its rights of self-government and its independence of the state in all spiritual matters, and he expounded them in his writings. But in the event it turned out differently. He found that the people were in fact, incapable of managing their own affairs, and he had to place the government of the Church in the hands of the princes and magistrates. The deplorable story of the brutal suppression of the Peasants' Rising, at his instigation, showed how far he had lost his faith in the common man. Yet it must be remembered that in calling up "the godly prince" to govern the Church, Luther did not regard himself as going ouside the Church to the secular power. He was only entrusting the rule to the chief members of the Church instead of to its members as a whole.

In the Augsberg Confession of 1530—the standard of the German Evangelical Church—written by Melanchthon but cordially approved by Luther, it is laid down that the ecclesiastical power and "the power of the sword" are both ordained by God, but different in their functions. The ecclesiastical power does not interfere with political administration: it is concerned with preaching the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The civil ruler is to defend men's persons and properties in the interests of justice. But, in spite of the Confession of Augsberg, the civil power did in practice interfere in religious matters.

The Luther who began by asserting the liberty of all Christian men came to recognise the territorial prince as head of the territorial Chuch. He supported the preposterous doctrine *cuius regio, eius religio*—a state-dominated religion. From this followed the all too frequent subjection of the Lutheran Church to secular authority. The practical result has been that the dominion of Christ was restricted to the inner world of men's hearts while the conduct of the state was left to the dictates of practical necessity. Obedience has been the main political virtue, with the natural result of an acquiescence in existing political conditions. An unqualified assertion that the powers that be are ordained of God leads too readily to toleration of authority, however outrageous. This makes all the more noteworthy the magnificent stand of the Norwegian Church in recent years, and the heroic protest of the Confessing Church in Germany itself against the Nazi State and all its doctrines.

2. Calvinism

Calvin had a simpler practical task than Luther in that he was primarily concerned with organising the Church within the limits of Geneva, a Protestant republic of some 2,000 citizens. But he had also the advantage of a much more systematic mind. Luther was something of an improviser; Calvin was a fundamental and logical thinker.

Calvin sought to create a theocracy in Geneva. The Church must be free in all spiritual matters to obey the Will of God revealed in the Bible; and from his time onwards this has been a first principle for all Churches of the Reformed Calvinistic tradition. But Calvin carried his principle of theocracy a stage further. God is sovereign over all life—not only over the realm of the Word and Sacraments. The Church, as God's representative, must have authority over the morals of all its members, and that meant in Geneva over all the citizens, since Geneva by popular vote had accepted the Reformed religion.

Calvin did not identify the Church with the clergy, and lay elders were associated with them in this task of moral super-

vision. It is not surprising that the Consistory became a tyrannical busybody in its interference with men's private lives. Here—as in his theological doctrine of predestination—Calvin did not adequately allow for the freedom of moral personalities, and so offended against a fundamental Christian principle.

But there was much to admire in the State of Geneva in those days, and in his insistence that social righteousness is a concern of the Church, he taught Christians a valuable lesson. The care of the poor, the improvement of sanitation, the promotion of education up to university level, were all part of the task of this Church-State. But unhappily Calvin accepted the then universal view that spiritual discipline should be enforced by civil penalties and heresy suppressed by force. That was not Calvinism: it was just everybody's unquestioned view. In those days the idea of toleration had hardly been born, though it was out of Calvinism that it later arose.

Calvinism has always educated its followers to be active citizens of the state. It has refused to admit that the state is immune from moral criticism. The Church cannot avoid having a definite responsibility for the state and society. The Christian message has a bearing on all the aspects of human life, including politics.

3. Anglicanism

There are people who ought to know better who trace the Reformation in England solely to the anxiety of Henry VIII to secure a divorce from an unwelcome wife. That is not history. There was an evangelical movement of Church Reform in England long before Henry and his wives, and there was a strong national sentiment in favour of throwing off papal domination. Henry was astute enough to make this religious and national temper serve his own somewhat sordid ends.

None the less it is true that, while in Europe the spearhead of the Reformation was a religious revival that led to political consequences, in England the occasion for the first step was political, and the spiritual aspects of the movement found expression later. And this proved of great importance in affecting the subsequent relations of Church and state in England. The King not the Pope, claimed to be head of the Church, and all subsequent changes in doctrine and worship were made under the aegis of the state. Henry, and Elizabeth after him, were thorough totalitarians and claimed and exercised supremacy in Church as well as in state. Elizabeth appointed and managed her own bishops. She laid down the law about forms of worship and suppressed any who would not conform.

One of the masterpieces of English literature belonging to

this period is Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*. In it, echoing the old medieval doctrine, he expounded a theoretical justification for this state control which has remained influential in Anglican circles up to the present day. England, said Hooker, was a Christian country and "there is not any man of the Church of England but the same man is also a member of the Commonwealth, nor any member of the Commonwealth who is not also of the Church of England." Church and state are different aspects of "the same society" and hence he defends "the spiritual dominion or supreme power in ecclesiastical affairs" of Christian kings.

The Act of Settlement in 1701, provides that anyone who comes to the throne must be in communion with the Church of England. But although the ecclesiastical functions of Parliament remain substantially unaltered, it has been gradually opened to Nonconformists, Roman Catholics, Jews and unbelievers. In 1919 an attempt was made to ease the situation by the creation of the National Assembly of the Church of England. Its measures, if certified as constitutional by an ecclesiastical committee of Parliament, are to receive the royal assent. Yet Parliament twice in 1927 and 1928 rejected measures for the revision of the Prayer Book—an explicit subordination of the ecclesiastical to the secular power.

In plain fact the Church of England is not free to determine the form of its liturgy or to appoint its spiritual leaders. Its fathers in God are chosen for it by the Prime Minister. In actual practice this no doubt normally works well enough. But to us it seems axiomatically outrageous for the leaders of a Christian Church to be appoined by the head of a government who need not even be a member of the church, or indeed of any church at all. The Church of England is, in fact, in a state of uneasy tension about this whole issue. Recently the Archbishop of York has made an outspoken claim to spiritual freedom for the Church. And the end is not yet.

The truth is that the attitude of Anglicans to the state has always been decided practically, as is the English way, in relation to historical developments and never in accordance with a consistent doctrine. This policy has many advantages, but it is not without its difficulties. Certainly it ought to be emphasised that in practice Anglicanism has a more positive and constructive sense of responsibility to the state than many other forms of Protestantism.

4. Scotland

The Reformation developed along very different lines—and I think much sounder lines—in Scotland.

When John Knox and others drew up their Confession of Faith in 1560—some twenty-five years after Henry had been recognised as Head of the English Church—they affirmed that Christ is "the only Head of His Kirk" and its "Lawgiver," "in which honours and offices if man or angel presume to intrude themselves we utterly detest and abhor them as blasphemous to our sovereign and supreme Governor, Christ Jesus." "Religion," said Knox to Queen Mary, "comes not from princes but from the eternal God alone." Parliament did not confer freedom on the Scottish Church: it recognised that it inherently exists. That is the essence of the Reformation settlement between Church and state in Scotland, and in principle it has obtained until today, and is embodied in striking language in the Church of Scotland Act of 1921.

5. The Free Churches

One further complication in the picture must be noted, the Free Churches. Within Protestantism certain groups felt compelled to dissent from the majority view in their country. The Puritans in England were at first a strong element within the national Reformed Church. The time came when they broke away from it, or were expelled from it, because the majority did not in their judgement carry the process of Reformation to its logical and necessary conclusions, but retained too much of the old Catholic tradition.

So to the problem of Church and state was added the problem of the relation of the state and the state-recognised Church to dissenting churches. There had always been a short and easy way with dissenters—simple suppression by fire and sword. And at first Protestant majorities were no more tolerant of minorities than the Catholics had been. There is no need here to enter into the thrilling story of the growth of religious toleration and of the fight for religious liberty—a struggle not yet over in many lands. The Free Churches held the Calvinistic view of the respective duties of Church and state. Their existence at least made impossible the fiction that Church and state were co-terminous, and their influence on the development of modern democratic institutions, not to mention their influence on religious life, has been immense. It was only gradually, and after much injustice, that they achieved the position of liberty in the national life which is theirs today.

Some General Principles

This scamper across history has at least made it clear that there is no one consistent Protestant doctrine on nationalism, nation and state. But there has in fact been a growing consensus

of Protestant judgment in the direction of what may roughly be described as the Calvinist position.

There are three principles that would, I think, be very generally accepted by Protestants today.

(1) The Church, both in theory and in fact, is an ecumenical, that is universal society, embracing men of all races and nations. Though composed of sinful and imperfect human beings, it is nevertheless a divine creation and the agent of the divine purposes. To the Christian his loyalty to God is superior to his loyalty to his nation or state.

(2) The state, as well as the family and the Church, is in the plan of God for man. It can rightly claim loyalty and service, but it is not an end in itself. It exists for the sake of the good life. The state is not the ultimate source of law, but its guarantor: "It is not the lord but the servant of justice." (Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State Report.) The authority of the state is held under God, it is derived from its service of the moral law.

(3) The Church must in all spiritual matters be free of state control, though admittedly it is not easy to define the sphere of Caesar and the sphere of God. There is an inevitable tension, but if conflict comes "we must obey God rather than man."

The demand of the Church for spiritual freedom should mean freedom for all religious minorities, Christian or non-Christian. No Church should use the coercive powers of the state to favour its own interests against others.

But if we can no longer hold the theory that Church and state are but two sides of one coin, which seems obviously ridiculous in these days when the great majority of citizens are outside all our churches, is the only alternative to assert that Church and nation or Church and state are, and should be, entirely disparate societies with no organic connection? Surely not. The Christian Church in its essence is composed of conscious Christian disciples. But there is a latent and diffused Christianity among the people of this country as a whole, far beyond the bounds of the ranks of active Christian worshippers and workers. The recognition of the Church of England by the state as the focus and expression on "state occasions" of the national spirit represents something real and valuable in our national life. So in their individual lives many men and women who normally have little to do with religious observances turn somewhat pathetically to the parish Church for christenings, marriages and funerals. Granted that they only dimly appreciate what they are doing, is it not better that they should come so than not at all? Is not their coming at such crucial moments to be regarded as an opportunity to lead them further?

The life of a nation will be as religious as the lives of its citizens make it. Its Christianity does not depend on the presence or absence of an Act of Establishment on its Statute Book. In some countries anything like establishment is clearly inexpedient, and one cannot be blind to the dangers of any kind of patronage of the Church by the state. Better a persecuted Church than a Church that is the tame priest of an unrighteous government. Yet there might be a national recognition of the supremacy of God which need not involve any state control in spiritual affairs nor any stifling of the prophetic voice of Christian witness.

Each of us should be both citizen and Churchman, owing allegiance to both state and Church. They are complementary in their spheres, not antithetical. The state is not to rule the Church nor the Church to rule the state: each is to recognise the supreme lordship of God. The Church must seek to serve the state, not only as critic, but as a fellow servant of God's Kingdom. And happy is the state that realises its need of the Church, recognising in the fine phrase of Coleridge, that "not without celestial observations can even terrestrial charts be accurately constructed."

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