



# THE CHURCH, EMPIRE AND SOVEREIGNTY

By F. McEachran

THE criticism of the State which has been made in the preceding pages also applies to the Church in so far as it is an organised body of officials depending on monopoly sources. The unity of politics and ethics which distinguished the thought of the ancient Greek city-state broke down after the rise of Christianity, and its breakdown led to one very significant advance in human thought. It freed the individual from the narrow bonds of the city-state and led to a conception of ethics which was the necessary basis for future libertarian thought. The Greek city-state, like the Roman *imperium* after it, was a monopoly concern and one which demanded from its citizens (and non-citizens) duties and compliances only to be equalled in a totalitarian state of today. But if the medieval separation of politics from ethics was good from the point of view of setting ethics to develop on its own lines, it also had defects in other directions, some of which we shall now describe.

The general political point of view held in the centuries following Constantine the Great was based on the saying of Christ "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's" with its implication that there can be a demarcation between these two spheres. Human life thus yields the two aspects of the natural life on earth and the supernatural life in Heaven and both of these had their respective claims on the individual. The function of the State was to watch over the natural life on earth, while the function of the Church was to provide for the spiritual heavenly life, which was regarded as quite a different sphere. Unfortunately, it was far from easy to decide in any particular case what was the material element pertaining to the Church, particularly when, as in the collection of hard cash, both bodies made insistent claims. The real background of the whole situation was that Christian religion, originally a religion intended to satisfy needs of individuals, had slowly evolved a hierarchy which threatened to undermine or even supplant the State. The outcome was that the State came to terms with the Church and two bodies of officials, imperial and ecclesiastical, clamped themselves on to the human race for at least a millennium. The dual monopoly of Empire and Church was at best an uneasy equilibrium, at worst an interecine warfare, and it was natural that the gradual breakdown of feudal economy should bring it eventually to an end. Of the two powers it was probably the Church,

with its celibate and more disciplined hierarchy stretching like a net across Europe, which on the whole collected the larger dividends.

The return to a more individual ethic effected by the Reformation movement benefited the State rather than the Church and the growth of the new enlightened despotisms in western Europe, with their tighter control of the ecclesiastical rival, meant in the end a recrudescence of the conditions of the Greek city-state (i.e., in the growth of the modern totalitarian state).

Yet we have to thank the Reformation with all its errors for the survival of a belief in the free human organism, able to seek, in this world and the next, the salvation it may desire. The conception of a body of ecclesiastical officials suffered a blow from which it has not yet recovered and the way was at last opened to the development of a more natural religious outlook. What the springs of true religion may be like when the individual is set free no man may prophesy, but history at least can tell us how little officials have to do with it. The mystic has never flourished in the environment of officialdom. Protestantism, it is true, has been attacked for its alleged contempt for the social bond, but only those who mistake the organised State or Church for society can possibly hold with sincerity this point of view. The faithful can gather together to worship; they can formulate and agree upon their doctrines, just as they can gather together for other more secular ends in precisely the same way we have described in an earlier chapter. What they cannot do, once monopoly is broken, is to enforce their dogmas on other faithful by means of an Inquisition or other organised form of persecution. It is admittedly a fact that both in Germany and England the Protestant religion has made its peace with monopoly no less than the Church of Rome, but always it may be noticed with a fringe of non-conformity and dissent which refuses to yield. Nor would any true believer wish to denigrate the spiritual work of many thousands of Romanists who, equally with their Protestant brethren, have on many occasions fought a battle for freedom. We have only to refer to the long nominalist tradition in Roman theology to prove this and to show that despite the orthodoxy of the present there are other developments conceivable for the future. The "ends" of ethics may be in the next world rather than in this, but nothing can disprove the fact that the way lies through this world

and that man in this world is meant to be free. Man and society, man and the Church, are complementary and they can all exist without the State. Each man is an end unto himself and he realises that end only in society and the Church. It is in fact exceedingly probable that the solutions to problems of original sin should be handed over largely to the Church. Such is a problem which the future has yet to decide.

The rivalry of Church and Empire, which we have treated almost exclusively from the point of view of monopoly, brings up that indefinable term which goes in the modern law books by the name of *sovereignty*. Sovereignty, in the usual sense of absolute and arbitrary power, would have no meaning in a free society for reasons which have already been adequately given. On the other hand, in a society based on monopoly, power rises proportionately nearer to sovereignty according as the holder establishes more uniquely his monopoly position. In fact, if either the Pope or the Emperor had succeeded in establishing complete power on the collapse of the other we might have seen in the feudal world something approaching world sovereign power.

We say feudal world advisedly. There is a good reason for the fact that in medieval times the word sovereignty was very rarely used, and why it became popular only at a later epoch. The land system of feudal times was not, after all, conducive to the concentrated monopoly of any single person or class and the power of the Pope or Emperor at its highest point was far from being absolute. The structure of feudalism was, if anything, anarchic and the various claims on land (largely rental claims) from those of the Emperor at the top down to the serfs at the bottom constituted a system of balance and counterbalance hardly favourable to the development of power. Not till the breakdown of the medieval monopoly (such as it was) did the problems of sovereignty arise in the modern sense.

The whole post-Reformation society of nation-states with its doctrine of "balance of power" was the outcome of this growth of the State in Europe. The deadliness of the result varied, of course, from country to country according to the extent to which in different places the private individual remained free to think and will. In Germany, for example, a positively disastrous development was the Lutheran formula that on the question of war and peace it was the duty of the Christian subject to obey the ruler. The outcome of this has been very evil in the case of Prussia, not to speak of the German Empire. To what extent the state really used ideal motives in pursuing material ends can be seen most easily in the foreign affairs of Catholic and Protestant countries where a Richelieu, for example, would quite calmly suppress Protestants at home, while encouraging with all his power their activities abroad. Some of the consequences of the post-feudal situation were drawn by the famous Dutch legist Grotius who saw that as long as nation-states were independent and sovereign, some sort of international law

would be required. This discovery, which is only a discovery as long as the real background of state-power is ignored, is in any case far less important than a true understanding of what law is. Needless to say, this understanding was not possessed by Grotius.

We need not go over the history of the balance of power down to contemporary times. It is a lurid and dispiriting story. When, as it has sometimes seemed, sovereign power has acted according to moral ends, it was only because in such cases the claims of power and of morality happened to coincide. Some states, by their very geographical position in the world, have contributed much more towards human freedom than others, but it was not a virtue that accrued to them as states. We can say with some truth that England, France, Holland and America have at times fought battles for freedom when Germany or Austria have not, but a glance at the Empires which these freedom-loving nations have conquered will disillusion those who think that freedom on a mass basis was anything but an incident in the process.

On the other hand, nation-states like Prussia, in the eighteenth century, fighting for bare existence, have been openly distinguished for the practice of Machiavellianism, dictated less by the wickedness of individuals, however, than by the exigencies of political strategy. And probably we shall be nearer the truth in saying that the more we attempt to solve the moral problems among nations by means of nationalism and politics the more machiavellian we shall get. The rape of Silesia and the partition of Poland were regarded as blots on the moral escutcheons of the eighteenth century, but they are nothing to what we have seen since. Machiavellianism seems saintly in comparison with what we have experienced in the last few decades.

The upshot is that in a free society sovereignty, along with "nationalism" and the "balance of power", disappears. In its place rises the (literally) powerless society of the individual social life, not conceived as liberal atomism but as co-operation from which all elements of monopoly have been removed. Each individual will have as much power as he requires to be sovereign over himself and that power he will derive from nature alone, not from the state. Centralise anything in the world you like — industry, art, commerce — but not politics; that alone needs the greatest and most complete decentralisation. When this is done, nature is restored, and power and sovereignty return for ever to the individual human being.

But to return to the problem of sovereignty, the fact remains that when it did arise it showed itself very plainly and unmistakably. The breakdown of feudal relationships, the land grabbing in Germany and England followed by peasant revolts and the necessity for strong state power to restore "order", is the background of what the history books call the Age of Enlightened Despotism, which was also the age of the *raison d'état* and of the

(Continued on inside back cover)

## THE E.E.C. AND HONG KONG

*(Continued from page 7)*

The preservation of Free Trade in Hong Kong, and its consequent prosperity, is no doubt due to the urgent circumstances in which common sense could not be ignored. But there is some check on land monopoly, and this must have had some effect. All land belongs to the Crown but this great advantage has been offset by leasing the most valuable sites for periods of 75 or 100 years. When leases expire they are auctioned for similar periods but with a covenant obliging the lessees to undertake a minimum of development, so the site cannot be held entirely out of use for speculation. In 1961 the total revenue from lands exceeded the amount received from rates (levied on the British system) and yielded over a quarter of the sum received from income tax. Revenue from land in 1962-63 will be considerably higher. The sale of the lease of one site, in the vicinity of extensions to the Tin Hau Temple Road, more than paid for all the road works.

If the Hong Kong Government, instead of granting long leases, progressively adopted the method of collecting the site value annually, it is obvious that it could tap a source of revenue which at no distant period would enable all rates to be taken off buildings, reduce income tax and enable the territory to face with greater confidence the dark cloud which threatens its prosperity: the entry of Great Britain into the mis-named Common Market.

## INDIA

*(Continued from page 11)*

As we have seen most peasant families, especially the ones with the largest holdings of land, carry on many types of economic activity. No one has yet succeeded in separating out and measuring the capitalistic aspects of their economic activities. We do not know how large the capitalistic elements are in these mixed family activities, nor do we know how durable they will prove. I do not think there is anything to be gained by making believe that we know, when in fact we do not know. Up to the present, at least, capitalism has not been the dominant form in the countryside; it is premature to say whether or not it is the leading tendency today.

As for socialism, I shall refrain from arguments about the future. I think we can say what is the leading tendency in the contemporary community development projects and the vast new programme for the expansion of co-operatives. To the extent that they have been promoting anything in the economic field, they have so far been promoting not socialism but capitalism.

Despite all that we have heard about the great wave of land reform in India, from the *agrarian* point of view the transition from British rule to independent India has turned out to be a fairly conservative process. The most

dramatic event (perhaps more dramatic than profound) has been the skimming off of the top layer of great absentee landlords.

There are however forces and ideas at work today which may presage basic change. Today, all men are free. All men are equal in the sense of having equal votes and of being equal, in principle, before the law. All men are promised education. The idea is afoot that life can be and should be marked by some degree of human dignity for each and all.

These are all forces for great change, particularly in the structure of rural society. But if we have learned anything from those who have tried to assess India's economic and social development in the past, we should be wary about exaggerating the pace of change in India today.

## FREEDOM THE ONLY END

*(Continued from page 13)*

rise of Machiavellianism. In the feudal age when relationships were either individual or of small groups or at most a Pope or Emperor speaking ecumenically on very limited points, a good deal of morality could enter into human conduct in one way or another and probably did (if only by a back door). Morality implies reason and free will, which in their turn imply individual thinking and willing, which are always of necessity individual acts. But with the creation of the modern state in the Reformation period, and not merely of one state but of many, there was an end to any individual thinking and willing apart from those who represented the sovereign. There was an end, too, to moral purpose in international relationships. The state, which is simply a body of men preserving an unnatural monopoly, must of necessity be amoral. The men who constitute it do not think and will as individuals—which is the only real moral activity, but as a corporation, and the action which results is more like that of a blind force than of human beings—an absolute, omnipotent and arbitrary blind force.

A typical case is a statesman declaring war, when, quite obviously, he is in no wise thinking and willing for himself. He would not dream of following up for his own benefit the line of action he prescribes for others, but none the less his compatriots proceed to kill and wound large numbers of foreigners with the best moral intentions. Yet they too would never dream of behaving in this way for ends of their own, and they invariably shift the responsibility on to the statesman or, even more, on to the enemy, who is at least as innocent as they are. This is why the action of a state in going to war—and for that matter, in all its actions—is amoral. *Moral responsibility is individual, not collective and must always be so.* Hence an anarchic world would have a better chance of being moral than a politically centralised one.