

proviso that each individual would be expected to decide *afterward* whether or not to honor the result.

Within the political realm itself the drive is undoubtedly toward "single-issue" political parties, and we can only speculate about where this might leave the U.S. I, for one, do not look forward to such a system. It seems to me that it would not be based upon compromise and would inevitably become totalitarian. Hubert Humphrey, for example, despite a lifetime record of adherence to progressivism, already has been "purged" because of the single issue of 1968.

If there is to be a U.S. in the foreseeable future, I see no driving force to replace national security as a major factor which holds the society together. The current war, as is true of several earlier ones, is not a monument to the international state system, but a series of miscellaneous international racial wars would not be an improvement. The problem is a simple one; the leaders of the "New Politics" cannot have it both ways. They cannot disintegrate and integrate the society at one and the same time. If each individual is to be free to decide on his own which laws he will obey, which taxes he will pay, and which U.S. military action he will participate in, then we are indeed

headed toward a new, and dangerous, society. If an argument of this sort is dismissed as reactionary and as a call to glorify U.S. militarism, so be it. Herewith, one vote for a total re-examination of the domestic and international consequences for continued glorification of the "Nuremberg principle."

•
The Role of CRIA. To close on a more narrowly parochial note, I would suggest that questions such as those I have been trying to raise are uniquely within the area of concern of an organization entitled the Council on Religion and International Affairs (CRIA). Is it not time to deal openly and critically with the long-term impact of the alliance between human rights and anti-war forces? As for participation in the political process, can a society such as ours survive the psychological stresses that might attend a system requiring the citizen to vote almost daily on some significant issue? Will the centrifugal or the centripetal forces in our political life carry the day? As an organization with a long history of encouraging people to "talk" and to "listen," CRIA should welcome such challenges.

THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

Peter J. Riga

After centuries of discussions and disputes over the church-state relationship, it would seem that there is little to say about the "Christian and politics." The reality is that the relationship is more disputed today than it has ever been. Nor has the theology of the secular, so extensively developed over the past few years, increased the area of agreement about the perspective from which the Christian should look at the political order, how he can speak to it and to what extent the emphasis should be placed on "Christian" or on "politics."

There have been few political systems in man's history which have not appealed to God in one way or another for their justification or foundation or mis-

sion. The ancients made no distinction between Church and State, and the Emperor or King or Pharaoh was high priest (*Summus Pontifex*) of both church and state. The priests and seers were always at the service of the state to tell the king how well things were going and how well they were going to be; the protesting prophet could expect to have his head chopped off. The Jews and the early Christians were hated and persecuted since they refused to worship the gods of the empire or the Emperor. With Christianity we had the first separation of church and state, a position which the ancient world considered downright outrageous and seditious of established law and order. In the words of Celsus, the great second-century antagonist of Christianity, these Christians "were bad citizens, refusing public employment and avoiding service in the army; and while they

Father Riga is professor of theology at St. Mary's College, California.

claimed toleration for their own creed, they had no toleration for others; every god but their own they openly called devil . . .”

These Christians had no temples, no altars, no images, and boasted just that. The society, they said, was mad and gone astray and consequently was unable to understand what human society was all about or to do anything really good. It was interested only in its own greed, no matter how much injustice it heaped on the rest of the world. These Christians had no great interest in associating with “the respectable” people of their day who observed the law and order of society and tried to keep it running. These Christians were an outrageous lot since their association was limited to the poor and despicable people of the society in which they lived. Of learning they had little and cared less.

At every corner their lives were threatened by contact with the temples and statues; they were recognized in the market place by their refusal to buy sacrificial meats; they were absent from the public festivals and were obliged out of apostasy to reject the oath in the Emperor’s name; they were looked upon as godless and unpatriotic, in a state of more or less open rebellion against Rome. The situation was especially tense in the province of Asia where the populace was devoted to the worship of the goddess Roma and the Emperors. The tone, context and echo of the book of *Revelation*, for instance, written at the end of the first century, can only be understood in the context of conflict between the empire and the early Christians.

Such people were a bafflement to rational and urbane men such as Celsus. The Christians, said Celsus, were welcome to stay and become part of the empire, but if that was their choice, they must live according to society’s rules. Otherwise, they were to be exterminated. After all, what reasonable man would object against the simple rules of society, to salute the sun or sing a hymn to Athene. Whatever private views one had were one’s own affair as long as they had nothing to do with the commonweal.

It is here that we begin to see what the Christians were driving at, namely, that there was a law above that of the empire and to which the Emperor himself was subjected; that when there was a direct conflict, rather than that of the empire the higher law of God was to be obeyed; that for the first time in human history there was a separation and distinction between the political and the properly religious orders. Finally, in the words of the great Origen who wrote *Contra Celsum*, he was perfectly certain—as were all Christians—that God had created the whole universe for the exclusive sake of man and that the Emperor’s job

and the task of the political empire was to insure the human dignity of all its subjects. In man alone or in reference to man, creation had its purpose and meaning. God commanded that the world provide that which is needed by man; as he is weak there must be compassion; as he is sinful there must be forgiveness; and above all, as he is Godlike, his life must be seen as sacred. This was a revolutionary view if there ever was one, namely, that society exists for man not man for society and that, implicitly, man has certain rights as person before God that no other person, no other institution may abridge or abrogate without committing blasphemy.

The warfare was on but Caesar was not to be undone. What he could not defeat, he finally used for his own purposes. Constantine gave the Christian church its freedom and since that time by various mechanisms such as tribalism (later nationalism), Caesar enlisted God and the local Christian churches in his behalf. The themes of “Deus Vult,” “Crusades,” “love of God and country,” etc., corrupted the original vision of the early Christians so that through the centuries, Christians frequently became the new Celsus, rationally arguing against those who would appeal to religion or to a higher law against the demands of Caesar.

•

Yet, the mere recognition of a higher law or the acceptance of a distinction between church and state does not tell us to what extent one should influence, control, guide or direct the other. The demarcation line has always been precarious in the Christian tradition since St. Augustine, with the forces of domination and control of one by the other shifting back and forth between church and state.

It is evident that the pendulum has swung to the side of political authority and what the church and Christians must elaborate is a theory which establishes a position midway between secular absorption and secular separation. The rather unspecified, ideal principle for the Christian in political life is still that enunciated by Origen: that the sole function of the state is to guarantee dignity and justice to every person in its domain for the simple reason that man is “Godlike.” This principle is terribly ambiguous and in order to obtain flesh and bone in the reality of history, it must become specified and attached to particular issues in particular places. Given the high complexity of issues today, any particular solution to these problems by Christians will always be more or less ideal, more or less correct and always subject to further change as the human reality changes in history. Therefore, there can be no “perfect” or “Chris-

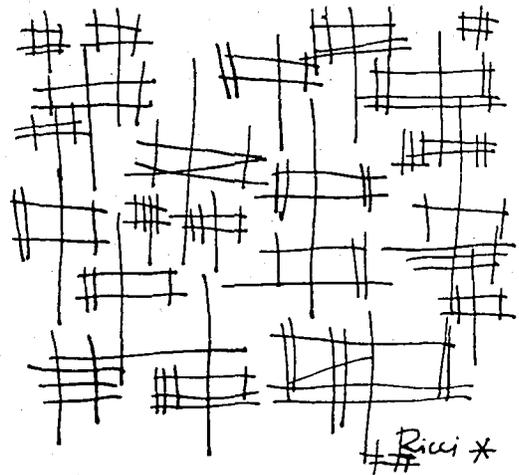
tian" politics or economy, or indeed any "Christian" solution to particular problems of social justice.

Nevertheless, local Christian churches have, since the time of Constantine, played the game of the gospel where God has been "on their side" against all enemies who then become the enemies of God (Muslims, heretics, Cathari, Protestants, Catholics, Germans, Japanese and finally, Communists). In any war, God is the first to be drafted in order to identify, as in ancient times, the political and divine orders. It is a heresy as old as Christianity and a constant temptation for Christians living in a particular national state. All dispute God: totalitarian democracy, liberal democracy, law-and-order advocates as well as those who advocate violence and non-violence. God is invoked to preserve order, to bless guns, ships and bullets as he was formerly called on to bless bows and arrows, muskets and spears. And he is invoked today by those who see the gospel of revelation as revolution. (The moderates want to bomb only "things" instead of "people" so that "the system," which actually kills and crushes people, can be brought to a grinding halt. The means here, as in S.D.S., imperceptibly become the ends.) Each side makes use of papal documents, the non-violent of *Pacem in Terris* and those who advocate revolution, *Populorum Progressio*.

Perhaps we should stop for a few moments to investigate once again the old model of church-state relationship given to us by the primitive Christian community before it was implicated in the political turmoil of Constantine. The adage of the primitive Christian community was simply that such a thing as "Christian politics" does not and cannot exist. Political order exists among men for the simple reason that there are men who inter-relate, but this order is human and a good theology of this order will simply refuse any interpenetration of the earthly city and the church; both autonomies must be fully respected in ends as well as means. In this perspective, the two orders have their own objectives, resources, legalisms which are specifically distinct, and in order to keep a sane balance this distinction must be maintained against any recurring temptation toward identification, whether left, right, middle, violent, non-violent or revolutionary.

It was clear for these early Christians (Origen is a testimony) that both orders have the same God, creator and redeemer. Both are related to Him: the one, by serving justice and the other, by relating man to the transcendent. Both orders will be related and consummated at the end of time where unity will be complete. This early Christian view of the two orders immediately discards the notion that the trans-

dental order is good whereas the terrestrial is evil. Christians from the very beginning have rejected this view of the relationship between the two orders. The two are related *eschatologically* but this tells us little about their relationship *incarnationally*. Between this convergence at the infinite in God, there remains the "in between" time of the church between the inauguration of the kingdom in and by Jesus on earth and its eschatological consummation in the *Parousia* of Jesus at the end of time. In this interval the two orders co-exist in space and time without confounding or confusing the two in their ideology or their *praxis*. There is a normal parallelism between the two which must be respected so as to avoid sorrowful incursions like those in the past: dangerous alignments of the two where one becomes the buttress of the *status quo* of the other as well as moralistic condemnations on the part of the church (or her members) due to a deep ignorance of political reality and *praxis*. Both of these attitudes flow from the same attitude, that is, where the one order wants to subjugate the other for its own ends, the secular in order to serve the limited purposes of the commonweal and the church trying to create the perfected eschatological kingdom in the *now*.



The two orders, however, are encountered in the one person who is both religious and political. He is a citizen of both cities but he cannot be two persons; he cannot, therefore, act in either capacity without taking account of the other. It is inevitable that the Christian will attempt to project his vision on the world and that in order to do this he will have recourse to the vocabulary and experience of the gospel. On the other hand, he is tempted to relate his political experience to the gospel. Dialogue between the two orders there must be, and it can happen that there can be confrontation between the two. On particular points there can indeed be a direct contradiction between political command and the gospel as has happened historically. In such a case there can be no

doubt where the Christian should choose to stand, no matter what the political or social consequence will be to him.

This direct confrontation, however, is very infrequent in history. Much of the time, this dialogue between the two orders will simply remain confrontation and the Christian must be on his guard against two easy solutions: to simply ask of the gospel a simple solution for complex political problems (usually called a "prophetic voice") and, on the other hand, to allow the political to make all forms of decisions for man without a constant critique by the church.

The evangelical totality in all of its complex density of doctrines and institutions is structured, organic and endowed with a vitality strong enough to maintain distinction between the two orders. When political reality gives over to the citizen certain decisions of a private and intersubjective nature these decisions can be occasions for the practice of Christian virtue and the practice can carry with it the witness of its inspiration (the gospel). But this evangelical injection (or inspiration) in the political tissue must respect the finality and *praxis* of the political order and, by definition, it cannot and must not become a form of "Christian politics," where the reality of the two orders becomes obscured.

History has seen what happens when the two visible frontiers are not respected and our theology has been inheritor of the various ways of conceiving this relationship in the various traditions: the Catholic (e.g., Christian empires, Christian democracy) and the Protestant (e.g., social gospel, constructive Protestantism). We see here a whole theological spectrum as these Christians attempt to show the ray of the kingdom on earth, suited to every taste but neglecting to tell us of the sometimes terrible price one must pay (Crusades, Holy Wars, Inquisition, witch hunts, confusion of ideologies, etc.)

The theologians who wish Christians to be open to the world and attentive to the "signs of the times" must see that it is poor service to the Christian and to the world (which is pluralistic) to attempt to bring about a sacrilization of common tasks of the city, to bless boats and planes whose makers and users are not Christian at all. These theologians with their neat theories regarding the "joining" or "cooperation" of the two orders (in whatever subtle way) would be hard pressed to explain the fact that Christ paid the temple tax to a colonial and occupying power without asking whether such a tribute corresponded to the norms of his social justice. Jesus simply commands his disciples to obey Caesar without contesting or

confronting him or without even defining him. St. Paul sometimes just emphasizes a simple human morality to which Christians as well are submitted to.

It is precisely because the ecclesial has made itself subservient to the secular that the church has seldom been the leader in the human struggle for human dignity. This does not mean of course that the Christian can be indifferent to the political system or that the Christian is not sometimes obligated to struggle against what he thinks is wrong in the political order and vice-versa. The only thing that he cannot do is to "baptize" any political solution or system as "being essentially Christian." For the most part, what we can expect in the earthly city is a modicum of justice. Toward this, the Christian is obliged to struggle as a Christian within the human order of politics, following its own objectives and specificity of means and *praxis*. The *Pastoral Constitution* of Vatican II has given Christians some solid directions along these lines (cf. *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, par. 7 and *Pastoral Constitution*, par. 36). These paragraphs join the ancient tradition of the *Duo sunt* of Pope Gelasius in 494:

Two there are, august Emperor, by which this world is ruled on title of original and sovereign right—the consecrated authority of the priesthood and the royal power in such a way, therefore, that the Christian Emperors on the one hand need, for eternal life, the priests and that the priests in the conduct of temporal affairs, use the imperial dispositions. Hence, the spiritual activity is to be safe from worldly incursions and engaged in the service of Christ never to be enmeshed in the affairs of the world. . . . In this way, the measure which rules the two orders will be saved and their distinction will protect men from pride; in this way each of the specific types of activity is assigned a proper competence and function.

It is clear from both the gospel and the apostolic period that they both underline the autonomy of the two orders as well as their differences. This testimony does not ignore the empire nor does it despise its legitimacy. It is true that the first centuries of the Christian church were marked by an indifference to political life and this needed to change, but there can be no bridging of the essential distance between the two orders. The only thing that is possible between them is a certain indirect influence by the work of Christians which, in diverse periods of time, can be strong or weak. The means used by the city of man attain and aim at an end which is homogeneous; the conduct of Christians has as its end not to introduce the kingdom on earth, but to introduce us into the kingdom.