

THE INFLUENCE OF ROMANS XIII ON CHRISTIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT II. AUGUSTINE TO HINCMAR

WILFRID PARSONS, S.J.

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Washington, D.C.

I. ST. AUGUSTINE

IN a preceding article,¹ the place held by St. Paul's precepts on civic obedience in the Thirteenth Chapter of his Epistle to the Romans was studied in the earliest writings of the Church before the time of St. Augustine. It was shown that St. Paul was understood to have taken up and complemented the revolutionary teaching of the Saviour which formally announced the separate and distinct spheres of the temporal and spiritual rule of mankind. God and Caesar both have their respective claims on man's conscience. St. Paul gives the reason: Caesar's power also comes from God; or rather, it is God's power exercised by man for man's good. Caesar is the minister of God.

We also saw, however, that this simple and clear teaching does not entirely settle and clarify man's relations with his secular government. Lacking the Aristotelian doctrine that man by his nature is a political animal as well as a social animal, some of the early Fathers failed to make a distinction between the power, which is from God, and the office itself, which is of human right. All of them derived political rule from the fact of sin, just as they did those other social institutions, private property and slavery. To them that seemed the clear implication of St. Paul's teaching in Romans 13. If men had not sinned, there would have been no political rule, for this rule was conceived as merely coercive government, a thing which would have been an idle usurpation in the state of equality which accompanied the state of innocence. Thus, lacking a justification in natural law for political rule, they escaped anarchy by seeking it solely in the decree of God following man's fall. St. Paul's teaching was thus narrowly circumscribed

¹*Theological Studies*, I, 4 (Dec. 1940), 337-364.

to a few simple precepts, foremost of which was the duty of Christian man to show reverence and obedience to his temporal rulers as a penalty for sin. Moreover, St. Paul remained practically the sole source of political thinking.

ST. AUGUSTINE

When we approach St. Augustine, however (354-430 A.D.), we at once enter into a wider and more comprehensive field. Political thought is no longer merely an exegesis of Romans 13. That passage, indeed, still exercises a profound influence, as we shall see, but greater and more revolutionary considerations enter into the field. For the first time, in St. Augustine we see the Church beginning to entertain two definite convictions concerning this world: 1) that the Church was destined to remain in this world for a long time; and 2) that the Church has a temporal mission as well as a spiritual one, a clear calling to be the creator of a new secular civilization. These two convictions seem to me to be the key to all of St. Augustine's political thought.

Now, naturally, in a paper devoted to only the one aspect of political thought, the continuing influence of St. Paul on it, it cannot be expected to find a detailed and comprehensive outline of the Augustinian political synthesis. It will be necessary, however, to recall certain high points in it.

St. Augustine's thought about the temporal world revolves around four master ideas: Peace, Justice, Order, Law. Without entering into the rather artificial controversy about which of these master ideas is the chief one,² we may say that by the mere mention of them our minds are lifted on to a vast plane of contemplation which embraces a new civilization. Thus we will find that St. Augustine at the same time goes both before and after St. Paul's ideas, giving us both a foundation and an application of them.

St. Augustine, consciously or unconsciously, was led, on the

²Bernheim, *Politische Begriff des Mittelalters*, pp. 1-23 (quoted by Arquillière, cf. *infra*) holds it to be *Pax*, peace. Arquillière, in *L'Augustinisme Politique*, pp. 9-21, thinks it is Justice, and then Order. This writer at present inclines to the view that the true guiding idea is Law, which while it is not mentioned so often as the others, is certainly conceived as being at the foundation of them.

occasion of the menace to established order contained in Alaric's sack of Rome in A.D. 410, to bend his powerful mind to the problem of the future fate of mankind if the Roman Empire fell. It is, I think, quite commonly agreed that his solution was the fusion of the natural and the supernatural into one synthesis. To him philosophy and theology were not two separate sciences, but one law of God. Fear of the frightful abyss of Manicheism, out of which he providentially escaped, would naturally lead him to exalt the supernatural, but it did not, as some have always thought, bring him to absorb the natural in the supernatural. Dualism remained for him, as for all Christian thought, the true expression of reality, though many forms of semi-Christian monism have claimed him as their inspirer if not their author.

There are two laws, he teaches, the temporal and the eternal. Both have their origin in God. The greater precepts of justice, which are the same as charity in its largest sense, were given by Christ but the lesser precepts also came from God on Sinai.³ This Divine law dictates the natural order, both in man and in society and bids it be preserved, forbids it to be disturbed.⁴ There are, then, two laws, the eternal and the temporal, and the temporal is derived from the eternal, bringing order among men, through justice.⁵ Man, therefore, finds for the changeable fortunes of human life an unchangeable rule of action in this eternal law, and his laws, though varied according to circumstances, will always conform to it.⁶

All of this seems fairly commonplace to us at this late date in the history of the world, but if we project ourselves into his age we can see what a tremendous force he is injecting into society. Followed out, his theory of law, accepted by the Church, will remake the world and will, in fact, create what we call Christendom, a politico-religious order designed to unite mankind, by bending the supernatural to the uses of the temporal state.

³*On the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, cap. I. ML 34, 1231.

⁴*Contra Faustum*, XXII, 17. ML 42, 418.

⁵Cf. that remarkable passage in the dialogue *De Libero Arbitrio*, I, 6, ML 32, 1129, in which changes of government are justified. ⁶*De Vera Religione*, cap. XXXI. ML 34, 148.

It was during thirteen years of his life (413-426) that he worked at that general depository of his thought which we call the *City of God*, a sort of scrap book into which he poured his reflections and conclusions about life. All of these reflections concern the Two Cities, the City of God, and the Earthly City, not two separate societies—Church and State—as is sometimes falsely imagined, but two spirits of mind, intermingling with each other in the secular world, and each in its way determining the actions of the State and its citizens, one triumphing for the time, but the other destined to triumph at the end. When the City of God is paramount, “the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all.”⁷ At the same time, the temporal goods that are sought by the Earthly City are not evil things. On the contrary, “they are good things, and without doubt gifts of God.” Men go wrong only when, in their search for temporal felicity, “they so inordinately covet these present goods that they believe them to be the only desirable things, or love them better than those things which are believed to be better.”⁸

When St. Augustine approaches the question of the origin of political authority, we find him in full agreement with the Christian thought that preceded him. All men are by nature created equal. It was sin that introduced into the world the necessity of subjecting one man to another.

He (God) did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation—not man over man, but man over beasts. Hence the just men in primitive times were made shepherds of cattle rather than kings of men, God intending thus to teach us what the relative position of the creature is, and what the desert of sin. . . . By nature, as God first created us, no one is the slave either of man or of sin.⁹

This fundamental assumption will color all that St. Augustine has to say about the teaching of St. Paul on the source and aim of political power. His own exegesis is as follows.¹⁰

⁷*De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 28. ML 41, 436.

⁸*Ibid.*, XV, 4. ML 41, 440.

⁹*Ibid.*, XIX, 15. ML 41, 643. Cf. also *Quaestiones in Genesim*, I, 153. ML 34, 590.

¹⁰*Expositio Quarundam Propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos*, LXII-LXIV. ML 35, 2083-4.

First of all, he brushes aside all those false conclusions from the passage, which, as we have seen, introduced a dangerous anarchism into Christian life and thought. Christian liberty does not exempt man from obedience to his temporal rulers: "Man must not imagine that in the pilgrimage of this life, he may keep his own special order and not be subject to the higher powers to which the temporary administration of temporal affairs has been entrusted."

But then he promptly delves deeper than mere externals, and in the very nature of man, as he is, he finds the real reason why this is so: "We are made of body and soul and as long as we are in this temporal life we must use temporal things for the support of this life. Hence for that part which pertains to this life, we must be subject to the powers; that is, to the men who administer human affairs with some position (*honore*)."

In these words St. Augustine has furnished to the Middle Ages the foundation of the whole grandiose conception of human unity under the Kingdom and the Priesthood, which, as we shall see, was the culmination of Christian political thought. To man, a composite being of body and soul, yet one being, corresponds a twofold government, the Church ruling the affairs of the soul and the State ruling the affairs of the body. Christendom, a social being, and a moral person, is but a larger reflection of the physical human person.

Moreover, in these same words St. Augustine has furnished St. Thomas and the Scholastics, when they will have emancipated themselves from the assumption that man is not by nature a political animal, with the reason why that assumption does not hold. The necessity for governments for the affairs of both body and soul does not proceed from the opposition of body and soul which befell man as result of the Fall, as St. Augustine assumed, but dates from creation itself. Man's nature itself demands them, not merely man's fallen nature. It is obvious, however, that St. Augustine, influenced by his predecessors, did not see these two conclusions.

It is not, however, necessary for St. Augustine to have recourse, as did his predecessors, to the words of St. Peter before

the Sanhedrin ("We must obey God rather than man."¹¹) in order to exempt man from obedience to unjust and sinful commands. He goes on: "But from that part by which we believe in God and are called to His Kingdom, we must not be subject to any man who wishes to overturn in us that which God gave us for eternal life." Faith and morals are not subject to secular government, as the soul is not subject to the body.¹²

The man who thinks that he must also be subject in such a way as to think that his faith is in the power of him who is exalted to a position of honor in temporal administrations, he falls into a greater error [than to think that he may not pay taxes, etc.] For that proportion is to be observed which the Lord Himself prescribed when He said that we must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. For although we are called to that kingdom where there will be an end to all principality and power, let us endure our condition in the due proportion of human affairs, doing nothing with mental reservation, and by this very fact not obeying men so much as God who commands this.

In this last phrase, we are given, as we also saw in St. John Chrysostom, the fundamental reason for civil obedience. It is not subjection of man to man, which would be unworthy of equals, but of man to God. Political allegiance is raised to the level of a Divine service, and that has always remained the only rational justification of civil authority.

Moreover, St. Augustine also implies, in this passage on Romans 13, another consideration which further confirms the rationality of obedience to temporal rulers, and their subjection, in turn, to the eternal law. He makes a distinction between the permanent good and the temporal character of the goods which serve the body in this life. "These things pass away, and hence that subjection is to be placed not in any

¹¹Acts, 5, 29.

¹²Cf. also *Contra Faustum*, XXII, 17 (ML 42, 418): "To no one is there any doubt that in the natural order the soul is to come before the body. But in the soul of man is reason, which is not in the beast. Hence, just as the soul should come before the body, so by the law of nature, the reason of the soul itself should come before its other parts which the beast has likewise. And in the reason, which is partly contemplative, partly active, without doubt the contemplative excels. For in this latter is the image of God by which we are transformed through faith to sight. Hence the rational action must obey the rational contemplation."

kind of permanent goods, but in the necessities of this life." On the other hand, our subjection as to temporary goods is all-inclusive: "It is necessary that we be subject by reason of this life, not resisting when they attempt to deprive us of any of these things over which they have been given power." Here again the lesson was not to be lost on the Middle Ages: the power of the king, while not his own in its origin, is absolute with regard to the things over which he is placed, subject, of course, to the moral law.

In another passage which was destined to be often quoted in the Middle Ages, St. Augustine adds a third consideration by which human rule is fixed in its proper place in a scheme designed by divine Providence. He has told his hearers that they must not obey evil commands:

Are we puffing you up with pride or telling you to be despisers of well-ordered authority? We do not say this. . . . The Apostle himself tells us: 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but from God.' But what if he commands what you ought not to do? Here certainly despise the power, fearing the power. Note the hierarchy of human affairs. If the prefect commands, is it not to be done? But if he commands against the will of the proconsul, you do not despise the power, but you choose to obey the higher. Again, if the proconsul commands one thing, and the Emperor another, can you doubt that the proconsul must be despised and the Emperor obeyed? Therefore if the Emperor [commands] one thing and God another, what is your judgment? 'Pay your tribute; do your obeisance to me.' 'Right; but not before an idol. He forbids it in the temple.' 'Who forbids?' 'The higher authority. Pardon me; you threaten prison, He threatens Hell.'¹³

This "hierarchy of human affairs" is the keynote to all that follows in Christian history. In an organic society, when an evil command is resisted, there is really no disobedience; there is merely obedience to the higher powers, as St. Paul enjoined. There is a unity in all being, from the bottom to the top, and at the top is God, above the emperor.

This also solves the old problem of the bad king.

¹³*Sermo LXII*, 8. ML 38, 420.

By bad laws the good are tried and by good laws the evil are corrected. The perverse King Nabuchodonosor passed a savage law that idols were to be adored; the same king, corrected, passed a severe law forbidding the true God to be blasphemed.¹⁴ For in this, kings, as is divinely ordained to them, serve God inasmuch as they are kings if in their kingdom they command what is good, forbid what is bad, not only in what pertains to human society, but also in what pertains to Divine religion."¹⁵

Even the king, therefore, has the duty to forward the interests of the true religion, for he is also a minister of God. How seriously this was also taken in the Middle Ages, the history of Charlemagne and his successors testifies. St. Augustine himself may not have been aware how greatly he was filling out the whole pattern of the centuries that were to follow, for in his time there must have seemed very little hope of his idealistic principles being carried out, but his great genius, joined to the inspiration of divine providence, seems to have discerned the outlines of the whole, or nearly the whole, of the Christian commonwealth.

In this plan, the personal character of the actual ruler has very little importance. It is the rule of God that must be discerned in the power even of a tyrant.

He who gave power to Marius gave it also to Caius Caesar; He who gave it to Augustus, gave it also to Nero; He also who gave it to the most benignant Emperors, the Vespasians, father and son, gave it also to the cruel Domitian. And finally, to avoid having to go over them all, He who gave it to Christian Constantine, gave it also to Apostate Julian, whose gifted mind was deceived by a sacrilegious and detestable curiosity, stimulated by the love of power.¹⁶

The fullest Christian citizenship, then, in the spirit of St. Paul, consists of obedience to the utmost to the civil authority, out of obedience to God. This is summed up in the following:

When by Christ's command, you serve a man, you do not serve

¹⁴Daniel 3, 5-6, 96.

¹⁵*Contra Cresconium*, III, 51. ML 43, 527.

¹⁶*De Civitate Dei*, V, 21. ML 41, 168. Cf. also *De Natura Boni*, XXXII (ML 42, 561) where he tells us that "it is not unjust, that through the wicked (ruler) receiving the power to hurt, the patience of the just be tried, and the iniquity of the wicked be punished." In this passage he had just previously quoted *Romans* 13, with other similar texts from the O.T.

the man, but Him who commanded you. . . . What I have said of master and slave, understand also to be true of powers and kings, of all the exalted stations of the world. Sometimes they are good powers and fear God; sometimes they do not fear God. Julian was an infidel Emperor, an apostate, a wicked man, an idolator; yet Christian soldiers served him, an infidel Emperor. When they came to the accusers of Christ, they acknowledged only Him who was in heaven. If he called upon them at any time to worship idols, to offer incense, they preferred God to Him. But whenever he commanded them to fall into line, to march against this or that nation, they obeyed. They distinguished their eternal from their temporal master. And yet they were, for the sake of their eternal Master, subject to thir temporal master.¹⁷

Now I have not, as I have said, made an attempt to give the whole of St. Augustine's political philosophy in all its details. My purpose was only to trace out the development which he contributed to the crucial passages in St. Paul to the Romans. We can, perhaps, now see both how his doctrine is rooted in that of his predecessors, and how he has developed it to a completely practical pattern for the making of a new civilization under the temporal mission of the Church.¹⁸

POPES LEO, GELASIUS AND GREGORY (440-604)

When St. Augustine assigned the Church the mission of building a new civilization, he greatly augmented the authority and influence of the Roman Pontiff. It is not an accident, therefore, that within ten years after his death in 430, there began that great series of holy and powerful Popes, beginning with St. Leo the Great in 440, and ending at the death of St. Gregory the Great in 604. Between them we find St. Felix II, St. Gelasius I, and St. Symmachus, who greatly added to the development of the Church's conception

¹⁷In *Psalmum* 124, 7. ML 37, 1653. Other passages in which *Romans* 13 is cited on civil obedience are *Sermo XIII*, 6 (ML 38, 109-110); *Sermo CCCII*, 12-44 (ML 38, 1390); *Contra Faustum Manichæum*, XXII, 75 (ML 42, 448).

¹⁸I have not quoted the passage in *Confessions*, III, 8 (ML 32, 690), later quoted by Suarez, *Defensio Fidel, De Rom. Pont.* III, 2) to prove that his contract theory of authority was also held by St. Augustine: "There is a general agreement (*pactum*) of human society that its princes be obeyed." It seems to me that the context shows that St. Augustine merely meant to say that all men obey their rulers, without any emphasis on the pact idea.

of the place of the civil power in the divine order. It can be said that all of the new ideas they contributed found their origin in the writings of St. Augustine.

From this date also a further change takes place concerning the precise subject of this paper. Where, before, the Fathers of the Church are constantly quoting St. Paul to their Christian subjects to exhort them to be obedient to their temporal lords, from now on the shoe is on the other foot. The temporal lords are going to quote St. Paul to show the Popes that their own power also comes from God. This fact was not denied by the Church, of course, but a new color is given it by the acknowledgment of the two powers by which the world is ruled. We will see also that his new emphasis falls into two separate developments: at first the dual power exists *in the world*; later, the circle is closed and it has its seat *in the Church*. When that is done, the movement set on foot by Augustine will be completed.

We can see the first steps in the new way of looking at political power being taken by St. Leo the Great, who was Pope from 440 to 461. To him the Empire was the physical means for preserving and forwarding the kingdom of God on earth. With St. Paul he believed that all power comes from God. Writing to Emperor Leo, he uses these striking words: "Since the Lord enriched Your Clemency with the illumination of a great Sacrament, you ought ever to remember that the kingly power—the *regia potestas*—was given you not only for the government of the world, but especially for the protection of the church."¹⁹ Thus he was able to say in one of his sermons: "The highest ornament of kingly rule is now that the world's rulers are members of Christ. They do not so much glory in being born to the purple as they rejoice in being reborn in Baptism."²⁰

Within a few years after that, writing first as Pope St. Felix II's secretary, and later as Pope himself from 492 to 496, St. Gelasius I was formulating his famous synthesis which was to influence the current of Christian thought for many

¹⁹*Epistola ad Leonem Augustum*, CLVI, 3. ML 54, 1130.

²⁰*Sermo XXVI*, 3. ML 54, 255.

centuries to our day. The power from God is twofold:

August Emperor, there are two things by which the world is sovereignly ruled: the sacred authority of the Pontiffs and the royal power. Of these the weight of the priests is so much the greater that at the Divine judgment they are to render an account also for the kings of men.²¹ [*Hence there is a mutual subjection:*] As for what concerns the order of public discipline, if the religious prelates, knowing that the Empire was conferred on you by ordination from above, themselves obey your laws, lest in mundane affairs they should seem to resist the settled decree, with what eagerness should not you, I beg you, obey them to whom is confided the administration of the venerable mysteries?

Thus the priests obey the secular laws of the temporal prince and the prince obeys the priests in the spiritual order, for each of the two supreme powers in the world comes from God. It should be noted also, for it is highly important at this stage, that Gelasius envisions the two powers, each sacred in its origin, as co-existing side by side *in the world*, each supreme in its own sphere and each commanding obedience in that sphere from the other, and the two spheres separate one from the other.

In another passage, however, Gelasius interprets this grant of political and spiritual power in a way that will also have a profound influence on subsequent thought in imparting a complete change to this concept. There were times, he says, "before the coming of Christ, that figuratively yet actually, there existed men who were kings as well as priests, as the sacred history relates was Melchisedech." Then the devil imitated this among his own, and the Roman Emperor was also *Pontifex Maximus*. Now when Christ came, He was "truly both King and Pontiff." But He decided to "separate the two functions of each power into their own proper operations and distinct dignities." It is in this new way that he exhibits the teaching of St. Paul. God gave power to kings through the medium of the temporal Kingship of Christ, as

²¹*Epistola XII, 2. Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum, (Ed Thiel, 1868) I, pp. 350-1.* The words are *quibus principaliter mundus hic regitur*. With most modern scholars I have translated the word *Principaliter* not "chiefly," but in a way as to show its original meaning, which it undoubtedly had in the mind of Gelasius.

He gave power to the Pontiffs through the sacred Priesthood of Christ. Then he concludes: "Thus the Christian Emperors need the Pontiff for their eternal life, and the Pontiffs follow the commands of the Emperors for the ordering of temporal matters."²² Thus, on the face of it, Gelasius' doctrine is the same in the two passages, but from the Kingship of Christ he has introduced an element which will substantially alter the whole notion of the source and nature of the temporal power itself.

This development, however, will not take place for some centuries. Within a few years after St. Gelasius, we find Pope Symmachus (498-514) repeating the Gelasian formula in his own words: "By these two offices [Priesthood and Kingship] the human race is ruled, and there must not be anything in either of them by which Divinity can be offended, especially since both dignities are seen to be perpetual and the interests of the human race are in the hands of both." In this same letter to Emperor Anastasius, moreover, Symmachus, uses a striking expression which summarizes the doctrine. He seems aware that Romans 13 might be quoted against Papal claims, for he says:

Perhaps you will say that it is written that we must be subject to every power. We do indeed accept human authorities in their place, until they raise their wills against God. Besides, if every power is from God, so much the more is that [power] which has charge of the affairs of God. *Do you yield to God in us and we will yield to God in you.*²³

About this same time we find Fulgentius (468-533) pointing out: "in the Church no one is higher (*potior*) than the Pontiff, and in the world no one higher than the Emperor . . . the Christian Empire is better ruled and propagated when care is taken for the ecclesiastical state all over the world than when in some part of the world struggles are undertaken for temporal security."²⁴

When we come to St. Gregory the Great (590-604) we find more than once this same idea expressed that the secular

²²*Tractatus IV*, 11. Thiel, I, pp. 567-8. ²³*Epistola 10, contra Anastasium*. ML 62, 68.

²⁴*Liber de Veritate Praedestinationis et Gratiae*, II, 8. ML 65, 647-8.

power exists before all for the purpose of forwarding the interests of Christ's kingdom, the Church. Thus to the Emperor Maurice he says: "For to this purpose was power over all men given from heaven to my Most Pious Lords, that those who seek good should be helped, that the way to heaven be opened more widely, that the earthly kingdom serve the heavenly one."²⁵

Gregory, however, must be stressed in this matter for having impressed on his and succeeding ages the two fundamental notions of equality and liberty. "Nature," he says, "brought forth all men equal, but as the order of merit varied, a hidden dispensation subjected some to others. But that very diversity which came from sin is rightly ordained by the Divine command, that because every man does not equally travel the path of life, one should be ruled by another."²⁶ In this, of course, he follows closely his predecessors among the Fathers, who hold that secular authority arose as a result of sin and thus interpret Romans 13 as teaching that "all power" was imposed by God for the regulation of fallen human nature.

At the same time, however, the notion of liberty is advanced to correct the inequality that Adam's fall occasioned. Political power was not given for the advantage of the ruler but of his subjects. They are not merely means to him as an end, but rather government is a means towards their welfare. The ruler must recall that by nature his subjects are his equals, and therefore, they are truly free men. "This is the difference between the kings of the gentiles and the Emperors of the Commonwealth," he tells the Emperor Phocas, "that the kings of the gentiles are lords of slaves, and the Emperors of the Commonwealth are lords of free men."²⁷

²⁵*Epistolae*, Lib. III, 65. ML 77, 663.

²⁶*Moralia in Job*, XXI, 22. ML 76,203. Cf. the parallel passage in the *Regula Pastoralis*, II, 6. ML 77, 34. These two passages will be cited by Suarez, *Def. Fid., De Rom. Pont.*, III, 2, to prove from natural equality the necessity of the doctrine of power being derived immediately from the community. He rejects, of course, the doctrine of its being occasioned by sin.

²⁷*Epistolae*, Lib. XIII, 31. ML 77, 1282. He repeats the same sentence, with a slight variation, in *Epist.*, Lib. X, 51. ML 77, 1107.

Political power, therefore, in the mind of St. Gregory, does indeed come from God, as St. Paul teaches, but sin caused it to be brought into the world, not creation. In this he merely follows the Fathers, as I have said. It is noteworthy, perhaps, that he does not openly teach the newer formula of Gelasius.²⁸

CASSIODORUS AND ISIDORE OF SEVILLE

The turning point of Christian political thought from theory to realization comes in the latter part of the sixth century and the first part of the seventh, with Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville. Flavius Marcus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator, to give him his full name, "spent the first part of his life conciliating the Gothic and Roman peoples and the second part in conciliating the culture of the ancient world and the culture of the Christian world. Modern civilization was the outgrowth of the alliance brought about by him."²⁹ St. Isidore, with his elder brother, St. Leander, took a barbaric people, the Visigothic Kingdom in the Iberian peninsula, and made of it a Christian commonwealth.

Cassiodorus (479-572) is particularly concerned that the Pauline precept of civil obedience must have, as its correlative, justice in the ruler. Writing in his later years as a Benedictine Abbot, and commenting on Romans 13, he remarks: "He [St. Paul] says that we are to be subject to all authorities who command justly, because power is given by God and He is seen to wish to resist God who strives to go counter to judicial ordinations."³⁰ Hence in another place he refuses the name of king to the tyrant: "The kings of the earth are those that rule their bodies with the help of Divinity, for he is not a true king who is shown to be a slave to his vices."³¹ This is all the

²⁸I have not accepted the accusation made against Gregory by Carlyle, *Medieval Political Theory in the West*, I, 152-3, that he held an exaggerated form of the Divine Right of Kings. The passages quoted on absolute obedience to rulers turn out, upon inspection, to be rather exhortations to religious obedience by monks to their superiors, a very different thing.

²⁹Paul Lejay, S.J., in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. Cassiodorus.

³⁰*Complexiones in Epist. ad Rom.*, 29. ML 70, 1329.

³¹*Expositiones in Psalterium*, Psalm 138, 5, ML 70, 981.

more important in that the king has no superior on earth to coerce him. "When the king goes astray, he is guilty only to God, because he has no man who can call his deeds to judgment. Rightly, therefore, does the king [David] say he has sinned to God only, since He is the only one who could discuss his deeds."³²

Throughout his earlier life, acting as a sort of Prime Minister to Theodoric, in dozens of letters to minor official and subject peoples, Cassiodorus unceasingly rings the changes on the absolute necessity of justice in government if government is to justify its origin in God. His letters are filled with such sayings as these: "What is better than that a people wishes to live under the precepts of justice, so that a community of many living under discipline is the unity of wills? For this is what has brought the peoples together from a barbarous life to the rule of human intercourse."³³ "This is the source of reverence for law, so that nothing shall be done by force, nothing by personal impulse."³⁴ "What does it profit to have removed the chaos of barbarism unless life is lived under law?"³⁵ "The good prince is he to whom one can speak for justice; on the other hand, it is a sign of barbarous tyranny not to wish to listen to the settled principles of ancient laws."³⁶ It can certainly be said of Cassiodorus that in him we behold mediaeval civilization shaping itself in the flesh.

On the other hand, the writings of St. Isidore (d. 636) were the actual textbooks of the Middle Ages. Both his *Etymologies* and his *Sentences* together present a whole synthesis of political theory, which, of course, cannot be presented here. Suffice it to say that his emphasis is rather on the duties of rulers to their subjects than on those of subjects to their rulers. Typical of this attitude toward the Pauline precept is the following:

God gave precedence to princes for the ruling of peoples. He

³²*Ibid.*, Psalm 50, 5. ML 70, 360, commenting on David's words *tibi soli peccavi*.

³³*Variarum* Lib. IV, epist. 33. ML 69, 630.

³⁴*Ibid.*, IV, 10. ML 69, 617.

³⁵*Ibid.*, III, 43. ML 69, 599.

³⁶*Ibid.* VIII, 13. ML 69, 746.

wished them to be set above those with whom their lot is equal both in being born and in dying. Therefore government (*principatus*) is for the benefit of peoples, not their harm, nor should it dominate and oppress, but condescend and assist, so that this mark of power be truly useful, that they may use this gift of God for the safety of the members of Christ. For the faithful people are the members of Christ; when (kings) rule them well by that power which they have received, they in turn restore to God what He had given them.³⁷

While he freely admits, therefore, that all must acknowledge that political power is from God, nevertheless the prince must not be puffed up with pride because of that fact.

Every mark of power is not always useful, but only when it is properly borne. Now it is properly borne when it benefits the subjects over whom it is placed in worldly honor. Power is good which comes from God who grants it, that it may coerce evil by fear, not that it may freely commit evil itself. For nothing is worse than through power to have the liberty of sinning, nothing is more miserable than the power of doing evil.³⁸

In the discussion of this restraint upon kingly power, St. Isidore coins a slogan which will re-echo throughout the Middle Ages: *rex a regendo*—a king derives his name from ruling, and ruling (*regendo*) is the same as *recte agendo*. In the *Etymologies* he says:

Kings are named from ruling. As priests from sanctifying (*sacerdoes a sanctificando*) so kings from ruling. For he does not rule who does not correct (*non regit qui non corrigit*). For the name of king is derived from right doing, and is lost by sinning. Hence among the ancients there was a saying: 'you will be a king if you do right; if you do not you will not be.'³⁹

This is repeated with an important variation in the *Sentences*: "Kings derive their name from right acting, and so the name of king is held by right actions, is lost by sinning. . . . For they are rightly called kings who have known by

³⁷*Sententiarum* Lib. III, cap. 49, 3. ML 83, 721.

³⁸*ibid*, III, 48, 5. ML 83, 718.

³⁹*rex eris si recte facies; si non facies, non eris*, attributed to Horace. *Etymologiarum*, Lib. IX, iii, 4. ML 82. 342.

ruling rightly to moderate both themselves and their subjects."⁴⁰

Thus in Isidore the original precept of St. Paul on the origin of all power from God is turned upon the prince himself: the corollary of that teaching is that all power must rule justly; and if a king does not use his power justly, he loses it. The tyrant is no longer king. In one sense, this dictum had more influence on the Middle Ages than any other element of political doctrine. Yet in Isidore nothing is said of how the king is to be deprived of this power. He is still in the tradition of the Patristic Age when he says: "It is clear that both good and bad powers are from God; but the good when He is favorable, the bad when He is angry."⁴¹ As far as the subject is concerned he must simply endure the bad king as a punishment for his sins. "When God is angry, the people get such a ruler as they merit for their sins."⁴²

FROM CHARLEMAGNE TO HINCMAR

It is in the ninth century, under the reign of Charles the Great, or, as we know him, Charlemagne, that the whole preceding political doctrine comes to a sort of fruition. We even find some startling exaggerations on the part of some writers. Thus Cathuulfus, writing to Charlemagne about 780 says: "Be mindful, therefore, my King, of God, your King, in fear and love, that you are in His place above all (*in vice Illius*), to keep and rule His members, and to render an account on the day of judgment, yea, even through you. And the Bishop is in the second place, only in the place of Christ."⁴³

Sedulius Scotus (ca. 820) speaks somewhat in the same exaggerated manner: "The ruler who is beloved of God, whom the Divine ordinance has wished to be, as it were, His Vicar in the government of the Church, and has given him power

⁴⁰*Sententiar.* III, 48, 7. ML, 83, 719.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, III, 48, 10. ML 83, 720.

⁴²*Ibid.*, III, 48, 11. ML, 83, 720.

⁴³*Epistola ad Carolum Regem. Monumenta Historica Germanica (MGH), Epistolae*, IV, 502-3.

over both orders of prelates and subjects, must deal out justice to each single person, etc."⁴⁴ On the other hand, Abbot Smaragdus (ca. 824) while still going very far, is more in the tradition of Gelasius: "Do whatever you can, for the position you occupy, for the name of Christian which you bear, for the place of Christ which you hold."⁴⁵

Yet it must be confessed that Alcuin himself (d. 804), the preceptor and friend of Charlemagne, could speak in somewhat the same way. When writing to Ethelred, King of Northumbria, he could say: "Obey the priests of God. For they must render an account to God on the way they admonish you, and you, on the way you obey them."⁴⁶ Yet we find him writing to Charlemagne in this grandiloquent fashion:

There have been up to this time three persons most highly placed: the apostolic sublimity which is wont to rule the seat of Blessed Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, by vicarious power. . . . Another is the imperial dignity, the secular power of the second Rome. . . . The third is the royal dignity in which the dispensation of Jesus Christ Our Lord has made you ruler of the Christian people greater (*excellentior*) in power than the other aforesaid dignities, more famous in wisdom, more sublime in ruling power. Lo, upon you the whole safety of the Churches of Christ reposes.⁴⁷

In another writer, however writing about the middle of the ninth century, we find a doctrine more in accord with the development of the Church's thought on political power and its origin from God. Jonas, Bishop of Orleans, writing about 842, resumes the Gelasian tradition, and at the same time gives it a subtle, but powerful modification. To Gelasius, the secular power came from God along with the spiritual, and the two are in separate spheres and each one subject to the other in the other's sphere. But both exist side by side *in the world*. To Jonas of Orleans, both powers, including

⁴⁴*De Rectoribus Christianis*, cap. XIX. ML 103, 329.

⁴⁵*pro vice Christi qua fungeris. Via Regia*, cap. XVIII. ML 102, 958.

⁴⁶*Epistolate*, 16. MGH. Epist. IV, 44.

⁴⁷*Epist.* 174, *ad Carolum Regem*. MGH, Ep. IV, 287-289.

the political, come from Christ, in virtue of the Kingship of Christ, and are *in the Church*.

All the faithful should know that the Universal Church is the Body of Christ and its Head is the same Christ; and in it are two especially outstanding persons, namely the priestly and the royal, and the priestly is so much more superior in that it will have to give an account to God for the kings themselves.⁴⁸

It is natural, therefore, that to Jonas the teaching of St. Paul that the temporal power is a ministry⁴⁹ should be important:

- The ministry of the king lies especially in governing the people of God in equity and justice and in care that it enjoys peace and concord. . . . He ought to know that the cases which by his proper office he administers are not the cases of men but of God, to Whom he will have to render an account on the fearful day of last judgment for the ministry which he has undertaken.⁵⁰

Later, he thus sums up the whole teaching on the origin of political rule: "It is clear, therefore, that the earthly kingdom is conferred not by lust nor by desire nor by the arm of human force, but by virtue, nay, by an occult judgment, of the Divine dispensation, and therefore whoever has it committed to him, should be careful to administer and rule it according to His will."⁵¹

This notion of the kingly power as a minister of Christ will occur more frequently as the centuries proceed. Thus Hrabanus Maurus (776-856) after quoting the usual Isidorian slogan, *rex a regendo*, goes on: "In this world those kingdoms are laudable which are subject to the true King, the Lord Christ, who, spreading His Church over the whole earth among the nations and diverse places, rules and governs it according to his will."⁵² Sedulius Scotus, after quoting Romans 13, says: "The more the good ruler knows that he was ordained of God, the more he takes care with pious anxiety

⁴⁸*De Institutione Regia*, cap. I. ML 106, 285.

⁴⁹Romans 13, 4.

⁵⁰*De Inst. Rev.*, IV. ML 106, 290.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, VII. ML 106, 292.

⁵²*De Universo*, Lib. XVI, cap. 3. ML 111, 445.

to dispose and weigh all things with due order before God and men according to the path of rectitude. For what are the rulers of the Christian people but the ministers of the Almighty? So he is an equitable and faithful minister if with sincere devotion he fulfills what his Lord and Master commands him."⁵³ In the case of the actual deposition of the Emperor Louis the Pious, the Bishops noted that this action was taken "because the said prince had negligently exercised the ministry committed to him."⁵⁴

On the other hand, subjects incur a correlative obligation towards their rulers. Says Jonas of Orleans:

It is certain that the royal power should look out for the best interests of all its subjects according to the order of equity. For this reason it is right that all the subjects should obey the same power faithfully and usefully and obediently, because he who resists a power established by God, resists the ordinance of God.⁵⁵ . . . When they do that, they are clearly proved to fulfill the precept of God and keep due faith with the king.⁵⁶

The correlative obligation of the ruler to his subjects and of the subjects to their ruler which is implicit in St. Paul's teachings is a common enough teaching. Thus Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons, writing about 850, says: "Every faithful man owes sincerity to every faithful faith, and hence there can be no doubt but that to the faithful ruler, to whom the commonwealth has been committed to rule, should be shown faith by all who are in the faith subjected to the Divine ordinance, as the Apostle says, 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, etc.'"⁵⁷ This seems also to be the concept of Wulfadus, Archbishop of Bourges, writing about 866: "You also, the poor and less powerful, we warn to be sub-

⁵³*De Rectoribus Christianis*, I. ML 103, 293.

⁵⁴*Depositio Hladowici*. MGH. Leges, sect. ii, vol. ii, no. 197. The *Capitula Pistensia* of 862 (MGH. Leg., *ibid.*, no. 272) have this: "God . . . has wished that the king on earth should be and be called king and lord for His honor and in His place."

⁵⁵*Romans* 13, 2.

⁵⁶*De Inst. Reg.*, VIII. ML 106, 294. Cf. also the same writer's *De Institutione Laicali*, II, 22 (ML 106, 214) with the added notion of the subject's essential equality with his ruler.

⁵⁷*Epistle* 15, to Emperor Louis. MGH, Ep. V, 223.

ject to your lords and serve them faithfully, and give them their due without fraud and in truth, knowing that they have been ordained over you by God and that you ought to be subject to them."⁵⁸

Hincmar of Rheims (806-882) in his day encountered the Pauline precept in another form, that of the ruler placing too much reliance on it. In the case of King Lothair's divorce from Tetberga, the king's lawyers had said: "The prince is a king and is subject to no man's judgments or laws, but only to God's, who set him up in the kingdom which his father left him. . . . What he does, and how he should be in his government, depends on God." Hincmar's answer to this is blunt and to the point:

This is not the voice of a Catholic Christian, but of an extreme blasphemer and one filled with a diabolical spirit. . . . The king is subject to no man's laws or judgments save only God's . . . if the king is as his name implies. For the king is so called from ruling⁵⁹, and if he rules himself according to God's will and directs the good in right ways, then he is a king and is subject to no one's laws or judgments, save only God's. . . . He who rules himself and others according to the fruits of the spirit . . . he is not subject to the law for 'against such there is no law.'⁶⁰ He is subject to the law of Christ alone, by Whom he will be rewarded.⁶¹

Hincmar, in his turn resumes and develops Jonas of Orleans' development of the Gelasian doctrine:

It is the Christian doctrine, according to the meaning of Holy Scripture and the preaching of the elders, that by the disposition of God and Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone could be both king and priest at the same time, at whose name every knee bows in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, as the Blessed Pope Gelasius said to the Emperor Anastasius . . . "there are two things by which sovereignly" along with those who have any special responsibility "this world is ruled, the sacred authority of the Pontiff and the royal power.' . . ."⁶²

⁵⁸*Epistola ad Dioecesim*. MGH. Ep. VI, 191.

⁵⁹*The rex a regendo* of Isidore of Seville.

⁶⁰*Gal. 5*, 23.

⁶¹*De Divortio Lotharii et Tetbergae*, Quaest. VI. ML 125, 756. In Lothair's letters, *Romans 13* is constantly quoted in his defense. Cf. MGH. Ep. VI, 209, 217, 232, 238, 239, etc.

⁶²*Ad Episcopos Regni*, I. ML, 125, 1007.

Finally, while all kings have their power from God, good and bad kings have it in a different way. Here the Patristic tradition is strong. Everything in the world happens according to the will of God, but as for kings, "Many reign by the gift of God, many by His permission."⁶³ This permission, though "sometimes a hidden judgment, (is) never an unjust one," says Hincmar.⁶⁴ "When, therefore, kings reign 'from Him,' it is by His mercy, that the people committed to them may be saved. But when they do not reign 'from Him,' but by the permission of His just judgment kings seem to reign, it is a punishment of the sinning people and a completion of punishment for him who reigns."⁶⁵

⁶³Jonas of Orleans, *De Inst. Regia*, VII. ML 106, 293.

⁶⁴*De Regis Persona et Regio Ministerio*, I. ML 125, 834. Cf. also *De Divortio Lotharii*, Quaest. VI, ML 125, 757.

⁶⁵Hincmar, *Epistola* XV, to King Charles. ML 126, 98.

