

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

TEMPORAL AUTHORITY

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER we sought to trace the process by which the church at Rome was changed from a local church of true apostolic origin and faith into the Church of Rome, claiming absolute spiritual authority, not only over all individual souls, but also over all other churches, wherever found.

But Rome's claim goes beyond this. She not only claims spiritual authority, but temporal authority also. The keys of Peter, one gold and one silver, represent to Rome spiritual and secular supremacy. The two swords which Peter produced in the Garden of Gethsemane, and of which, according to Roman interpretation, the Lord said, "**It is enough**" (Luke 22:38), represent to them the same twofold authority.

These arbitrarily interpreted passages are the only two in the whole compass of Scripture which Rome can lay hold upon in support of her claim to temporal power. Spiritual authority is higher than secular authority, and since they teach that the pope holds both by virtue of being Peter's successor, all earthly thrones must be under his control. To quote from *The Question Box* again:

The Church is indeed a spiritual kingdom, established solely for the salvation of mankind. The temporal power of the Popes, which lasted for centuries, was not at all necessary for their spiritual power, because it persists of its own divine right . . . Catholics have always maintained that to carry on effectively their supreme world-wide jurisdiction as Vicars of Christ, the Popes ought not to be subject to any secular prince. As Pious IX declared in 1849, "Peoples, kings and all nations would never turn with full confidence and devotion to the Bishop of Rome, if they saw him the subject of a sovereign or government, and did not know him to be in possession of full liberty" (page 165).

The argument of "necessity" for temporal power in any form is utterly fallacious and contrary to the teaching of Christ and the whole New Testament. Our Lord Himself disclaimed all dependence upon the secular arm when He said to Peter:

Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matthew 26:52);

And again when He said to Pilate:

My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence (John 18:36).

Far from wielding temporal power, Christians are exhorted to submit themselves to the secular authorities, and Peter himself, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commands it:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (I Peter 2:13-13).

The Apostle Paul is equally emphatic in his teaching:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Romans 13:1-7).

And again:

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work (Titus 3:1).

It is obvious that the higher powers referred to are secular powers, for they are defined: “**the king**,” whom Peter says is supreme—not the pope, as Peter was supposed to be, though the name did not come into use until hundreds of years later—and “**governors**” carrying his delegated authority. The king and governors are God's appointees to rule in the secular realm, and he who resists them resists the ordinance of God. In the same way, elders—or bishops, as they are often called in the Scriptures, both having the same office—are God's appointees in the spiritual realm, as the Apostle Peter says in his epistle:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder . . . Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock (I Peter 5:1-3).

What they exhorted others to do, they were first to do themselves. They themselves were to be subject to the secular authorities, as an example to other believers over whom God had made them overseers. History tells how completely the Roman Church failed in this very thing, not as a matter of accident, but by deliberate policy. The historian Hume, writing of conditions obtaining in England in the days of Thomas a Becket, says:

The ecclesiastics in that age had renounced all immediate subordination to the magistrate. They openly pretended to an exemption, in criminal accusations, from a trial before the courts of justice, and were gradually introducing a like exemption in civil causes.

In his book, *The Pontificate of Pius IX*, published in 1851, Nicolini writes:

In criminal matters, the civil judge has no jurisdiction whatever over any person connected either directly or indirectly with the church . . . The very servants of a bishop, prelate, or cardinal, and even their servants' wives, are not amenable to the lay tribunals. They may insult, rob, and murder, but no one except the bishop has power to punish them.

This applied to the Papal States in Italy before they were freed from the yoke of Rome.

To go back to the beginnings, Rome's assumption of temporal authority ran parallel with her usurpation of spiritual authority, for the circumstances which ministered to her growing pride and strength were the same. Her declining spiritual life, and increasing political prestige and wealth under Constantine's patronage, the breakdown of civil government under the barbaric invasions of the fifth century, and the removal of the Imperial throne to Constantinople, leaving the city of Rome without strong civil authority, all played into the hands of men who knew how to assert the church's authority, and made the most of their opportunities.

By the end of the eighth century the pope conferred upon ecclesiastical foundations privileges which enabled them to encroach upon the secular jurisdiction. Nicholas I (851-867), by aid of the notorious forged Decretals, which were supposed to go back to the time of Clement (91-100), successfully asserted the subjection of the secular powers to the church.

Gregory VII (1073-1085), commonly known as Hildebrand, made it his settled purpose to raise himself absolutely above the secular authority, and make the papal throne undisputed master of the world. In his great conflict with the Emperor Henry IV of Germany, Hildebrand gained a notable victory when he placed the emperor under an interdict. Excommunicated and dethroned, with his subjects forbidden to yield him obedience, he was obliged to lay aside his kingly dignity, cross the Alps into what is now Italian territory, and during the bitter winter of 1077 travel hatless and shoeless, clothed in penitential garments of coarse white cloth, to the papal palace, where he knocked at the door for three days before being allowed to enter.

The goal which Hildebrand had set before the pontificate was finally attained by Innocent III (1198-1226) under whom the medieval papal system reached its zenith, and the pope was recognized as the possessor of all power on earth in things secular as well as sacred. In a bull issued by Boniface VIII in 1302, it was declared that the sword of temporal authority could be wielded by the monarch, only at the will and permission of the pope.

But now the tide turned, and a revolt against these pretensions soon followed. Philip of France succeeded in vindicating his independence as a sovereign. With the death of Boniface, the medieval papacy as a universal monarchy virtually disappeared. However lofty the claims made, the papacy has never since made good its authority over the civil governments of Europe.

Henry VIII of England broke with the pope over the matter of Romish supremacy. No one imagines there was anything spiritual in his stand for independence, nor was there anything spiritual on the Romish side. But Henry would be master in his own house. In 1570 the pope placed Henry's daughter, Elizabeth, under an interdict, forbidding her subjects to obey her. But like her father, Elizabeth would have none of it. She ignored the pope and carried on her government in spite of him, the English people, including her Roman Catholic subjects, uniting with her in her stand against Roman domination. From the time of the Reformation the temporal power of the papacy has declined.

Until 1870 the pope held direct sway in the city of Rome and over what were known as the Papal States in Italy.

As we would expect, his rule was a complete autocracy. The people had no democratic rights, or any authority in governmental affairs. They had only such privileges as the pope voluntarily allowed them, and these were liable to be canceled at his will. All government was in the hands of the church, that is, of the priesthood, and was exercised by them for their own benefit rather than for the good of the people. Such regulations as were necessary were established by proclamation or papal bull in the Latin tongue, which was not understood by the common people. Cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, and priests as well, constituted a privileged class. If any of the lower orders dared to appeal against any oppressive decisions or dared to read the Protestant Bible, or even books of history of which the papacy did not approve, they were haled before clerical courts and tried as for criminal offenses.

It is no wonder that in 1849 they rebelled and tried to overthrow the pope. He sought safety in flight, and it was not until the following year, when the Romish armies of France and Austria and Spain sent troops to reinstate him and give him the protection necessary to the resumption of government, that he was able to return. Yet after such an experience, in 1864 the pope promulgated a number of ordinances which show that his will to reign as an absolute monarch was unchanged.

To mention only three:

1. The government of no country may place any limits upon the privileges and authority of the Church; such power is invested in the Church itself [meaning the Pope] and she exercises it with or without the concurrence of the secular government.
2. Should the authority of the Church come into conflict with the authority of the secular government, then the secular government must submit to the authority of the Church.
3. The Church will exert its authority in government both directly and indirectly.

It is hardly necessary to add that, faced by such assertions of papal authority in secular affairs, the subjects of the Papal States readily welcomed the King of Sardinia as ruler of the new Italy, and in 1870 he entered the city of Rome. The Papal States and other adjacent territories were merged with the kingdom of Sardinia and became the Italy of today, with Rome as its capital. When a plebiscite was taken, ninety per cent of the population confirmed the new regime.

Although the pope still resided at the Vatican, his territory which had covered some 1,750 square miles and his subjects numbering about three million, all came under the control of the new king. Nevertheless, the Roman Church still strives for temporal power, as the ordinance of 1864 put it, “directly or indirectly.”

In 1929 Mussolini seized power and made a treaty with the Vatican. The northwest corner of Rome, with an area of 108 acres on which the Vatican stood, together with another fifty acres occupied by church buildings, a palace, and a radio station—this was recognized as a sovereign state, with its own postal service, currency, daily paper, radio, and a railroad (The railroad is rarely used).

Although the smallest sovereign state in the world, the Vatican has its official representatives in many if not most foreign capitals, through whom, and by means also of its vast educational program in every land, it seeks to influence the thoughts and actions of more than three hundred million adherents. To most of them the pope is not merely a spiritual head, but an absolute monarch with governmental, legislative, judicial, and executive authority all in his hands. Both in his little kingdom and in the church he governs, he is supreme, with no need to declare his purposes to others.

No one, not even the cardinals, can interfere with his actions. At his enthronement he is reminded that he is sitting on the throne of St. Peter, and is the Supreme Pontiff, not of Rome only, but of all the world.

The College of Cardinals assists the pope in his ordering of the church. Though they fill important functions, the cardinals are still his appointees. In 1576 the pope limited the number of cardinals to seventy, but that number has seldom been reached. Theoretically there are no national barriers, but in actual fact there has always been a preponderance of Italians. Pope John XIII recently added a number of cardinals to the college, which now exceeds the traditional number of seventy.

How has Rome used the spiritual and temporal supremacy to which she has laid claim? The history of the persecution of Huss and his followers, of the Inquisition in Spain and Holland, of the persecution and massacre of the Huguenots in France, and Marian martyrs in England, and many another page stained with blood is the answer.

In defense, where Rome cannot deny, she says that there were Protestant persecutions as well. This is true to some extent, and where it is true Protestants freely acknowledge the wrong done, but not so Rome. And the number of Romanists who suffered at the hands of Protestants is very small compared with the number of those who suffered under Romanist persecutions.

In these days of democracy and religious freedom, Rome cannot persecute as once she did, but the following extract from the *English Baptist Times* for July 4, 1957, shows how unchanged she is in spirit:

Missionaries of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade report that at Victoria, Caldas, Colombia, a governing elder of the congregation was administering the Lord's Supper when a priest entered, knocked the wine out of his hand, and insulted the group. Then the authorities arrived to help the priest take the evangelicals to a school, where they locked them in. When they were set free after sunset, a mob of fanatics were waiting, armed with clubs. Although beaten and bruised, they all managed to escape.

In the country district known as Samana, all the evangelicals have been driven from their homes by the priest and his "police force." The priest gave the order "not to leave one Protestant alive." The persecutors caught up with 24-year-old Belarmina Tabares Alvares, and her broken body was found later in the waters of the Tasajo River.

These riots and murder were instigated by priests of the Roman Catholic Church, by men who with papal authority can, and in fact still do, administer the sacraments and pronounce absolution for those who confess their sins to them. As absolute head of his church, the pope is responsible for these things—it cannot be pleaded that he does not know. In his position and with all his facilities, he is responsible to know what goes on.

Not in these two cases alone, but in many others also, Rome has proved herself through the centuries and up to this day to be the same ruthless foe of those who refuse to bow to her dictates. The only reason she does not now exercise the same despotism in enlightened lands like our own is that she cannot, for not only Protestants and men of the world at large, but also men and women of her own ranks would rise up and condemn her if she attempted to usurp all political power.

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