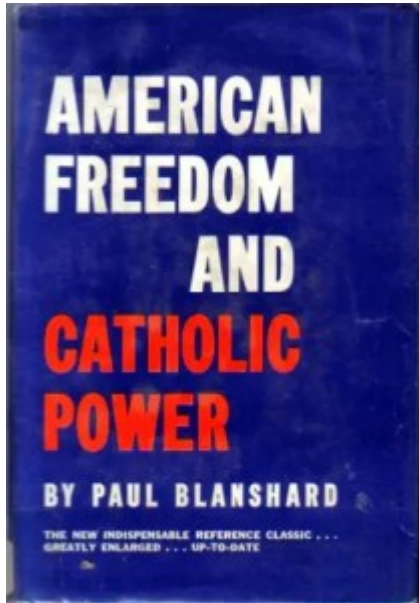


Church, State, and Democracy, Chapter III of American Freedom and Catholic Power



Continued from [How the Hierarchy Works – Chapter 2 of American Freedom and Catholic Power](#).

Thus far I have spoken of the Roman Catholic Church in its religious aspects. As an institution in this world the Church is also a political organization. When the word "Church" is used in Catholic literature, it may refer to the political entity or the religious one, or both, and the uninformed reader may be completely deceived by the double and triple meanings of ordinary terms.

The thinking of the average American about church and state is based upon the settled American tradition of the separation of church and state by law. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," says the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Throughout American history, with the help of Supreme Court interpretations, that amendment has come to stand for certain basic policies: complete freedom for all faiths, complete equality of all churches before the law, and freedom of the taxpayer from all general assessments to support a church which he does not endorse. State constitutions and statutes have made the "separation" interpretations even more clear and definite.

All three of these basic interpretations of religious liberty and the policy of church-state separation are in fundamental conflict with the world policy of the Catholic Church. As we shall see later, the Church frequently unites with Catholic governments to destroy freedom of religion for non-Catholics; it secures special status for itself as the state church, by means of concordats, wherever possible; and it charges part of its expenses, as a matter of right, to the public treasury when it has the power to do so.

How can such policies be reconciled with the American conception of church and state? The honest answer is that they cannot be reconciled, but this is an answer that the Catholic hierarchy is very reluctant to make in a nation where the Church does not include more than one-fifth of the population. Accordingly, the hierarchy seeks temporarily to impose its own philosophy of church and state upon the American concept without emphasizing differences, pretending that there is no fundamental conflict. It is a little like a child who, being unable to find the appropriate piece to insert in a picture puzzle, jams in the wrong piece loosely, hoping that somehow the puzzle will come out right in the long run in spite of the misfit.

For the time being the Catholic hierarchy must disguise the misfit by semantic artifice. It uses familiar words with private meanings. The word "church," the word "state," and the word "democracy" all have special meanings in Catholic dialectics. In general, the concept "church" includes a much larger sphere of power than the same concept when used by a non-Catholic; the concept "state" is comparatively shrunken and dwarfed; and the concept "democracy" is hedged about by a whole group of conditions precedent which make political rights dependent upon clerical approval. It was Humpty-Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass* who said: "When I use a word it means just what I want it to mean, neither more nor less."

Some of the confusion in church-state discussions is due to the deliberately evasive technique which the Catholic hierarchy employs in political arguments. Catholic priests frequently parry an attack upon the Church's political policy by shifting the defense to the field of religion. Many of the purely religious terms used by the priests have a latent political meaning that is not apparent on the surface. To understand the political position of the Church it is necessary to go behind its religious terminology and examine the dual structure of the institution.

The problem of the Catholic Church and the modern state is so vast and complex that any brief discussion of it can easily lead to confusion. I can offer here only enough of the major facts to give the average reader a basis for a tentative judgment. Probably the easiest way to introduce the subject is to run through a brief check list of elementary questions:

Is the Catholic Church a *sovereign power*? According to Catholic theologians, yes. It has the three requisites of a sovereign power, legislative, executive and judicial, including the power of coercion. The ruler of the Church, the Pope, claims sovereignty by divine right, and he is also the head of a small state, the Vatican State, created by the Lateran Treaty of 1929 with Mussolini. This Vatican State is ruled by the same machinery that rules the religious aspect of the Church. "The Holy Father is not alone the supreme head of the Catholic Church. He is also the head of a sovereign State. Thirty-eight countries have representatives at the Holy See." This statement was made by Cardinal Spellman on March 12, 1940, when President Roosevelt's 1939 appointment of Myron C. Taylor as personal representative to the Vatican was under fire. At that time nearly all the important countries of the world except the United States and the Soviet Union had official diplomats at the Vatican. By 1956, forty-four nations had representatives at the Vatican, and the Vatican in turn had nuncios or lesser diplomats at the capitals of these

powers. In addition, the Vatican had fifty-eight religious representatives serving as Apostolic Delegates in as many capitals, appointed by the same sovereign who appointed the nuncios.

How far does the Church as a sovereign power extend its jurisdiction?

Everywhere where there are Catholics. It claims that it is a supernatural institution with complete territorial jurisdiction.

What is the Pope's temporal state? For about seven hundred years it consisted chiefly of the nation in central Italy called the Papal States, a district about the size of Switzerland, running from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian, which was finally lost to the Vatican in 1870 when Italy captured it.

(Macaulay called this state "the worst governed in the civilized world.") Now, by the Vatican- Mussolini Concordat of 1929, the Roman Catholic state has been revived as a 108-acre section of Rome, with some extraterritorial rights outside of Rome. Its existence was confirmed after World War II by the Italian constitutional assembly, which inserted the Lateran Treaties in the new Italian constitution.

Does this Vatican State have a government of its own? Yes, it has a full civil government with a flag, a police force, courts, and postage stamps. It even issues currency in the form of gold and silver coins bearing an effigy of the Pope, and it has some 500 to 1,000 national citizens who use Vatican passports when they wish to travel. It has armed guards and before 1870 it had a full-blown military establishment.

Is the government of this state democratic? No. According to the first article of its constitution, it is a complete autocracy in which "the plenitude of legislative, executive and judicial power" is vested in the Pope.

Does this state have a diplomatic corps? Yes, a large and active diplomatic corps, headed by a Secretary of State, with ambassadors called nuncios.

Do these diplomatic representatives of the Vatican State have equality of status with the ambassadors of other powers? Yes and no. They have superior status in most cases, and the Vatican expects them to take precedence over other ambassadors. In most capitals they outrank the representatives of the United States government. In Berlin an American bishop, as Papal nuncio, outranks another American, the United States ambassador.

Do the constitution and courts of the Vatican State provide any check upon the absolute power of the Pope? No. Nominally the Church is ruled by Canon Law, which can be rewritten by the Pope at any time.

Does the Pope maintain a court and confer titles of nobility? Yes, he maintains a court in the largest palace in the world, and he appoints Papal nobles who are entitled to wear uniforms and swords. Incidentally, the grant of these orders of Papal nobility is a substantial source of income for the Papal treasury.

This is enough for the Vatican State. We have never (1949) recognized the

present Vatican State officially (in the US government officially recognized the Holy See on Jan. 11, 1984 during Ronald Reagan's administration. "From 1867 to 1984, the United States did not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See in the wake of rumors of Catholic implication in the Lincoln assassination." – Source: [Wikipedia](#)) , although we have dealt with it in a style of such flaccid friendliness that our relationship might fairly be described as semi-recognition. Our leading politicians like to be photographed in respectful attitudes in the vicinity of the Pope, and our State Department representatives in the chief capitals of Europe meekly acknowledge the Vatican's Papal nuncios as deans of the diplomatic corps without so much as a murmur of protest against the partial union of church and state which this procedure implies.

Our government actually did recognize the old Papal States to the extent of sending a string of consuls to its capital in the early years of the last century, and from 1848 to 1868 the United States had either a charge d'affaires or a resident minister at the Papal capital. However, President Buchanan, in commissioning the first charge, was careful to lay down the rule for him and for later representatives that the United States occupied an "entirely different position" from the governments which were "connected with the Pope as the head of the Catholic Church." Our representatives were instructed to keep away from "ecclesiastical questions" and devote themselves exclusively to "civil relations." Even this limited recognition of the old Papal States was allowed to lapse in 1868 when Pius IX became known as a reactionary, when some Presbyterians were refused permission to meet in Rome, and when the American minister narrowly averted the burning of 2,000 Italian Protestant Bibles in Rome. Anti-Catholic feeling was especially strong after *The New York Times* inaccurately reported that the Papal government was "the only Government in the world that recognized the rebel Confederacy."

From 1868 to 1939, our relationship with the Papacy as a temporal power was extra-diplomatic. Then, in 1939, President Roosevelt began a questionable era in personal diplomacy by sending the Episcopal steel magnate Myron C. Taylor to the new Vatican State (formed in 1929) as his "personal representative." The maneuver permitted the President to by-pass Congress and establish a new wartime diplomatic policy without ratification by the Senate. Taylor was called a personal representative but he was recognized by the Vatican itself as a de facto ambassador from the United States. The State Department furnished him with free quarters and a staff of assistants on the United States payroll, who did most of his work. It is not surprising that when Congress reasserted its authority over the situation after the war—and after the 1950 resignation of Taylor—our representatives inserted a provision in an appropriation bill that funds for desultory diplomatic missions could not be spent in the future without the specific approval of Congress.

Meanwhile, in 1951, when President Truman attempted to send General Mark W. Clark to the Vatican as a full ambassador, his proposal was met with an overwhelming and unmistakably genuine wave of popular opposition. Spearheaded by a new and militant organization, Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Protestant churches of the country united on the issue as they have rarely united on any policy in our history.

In the *Atlantic Monthly*, in a two-part discussion with Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., of Harvard, I pointed out that if General Clark were confirmed he would be the only full ambassador at the Vatican from a non-Catholic power. America did not want such a unique distinction. Obviously President Truman had misjudged the American temper. Mark Clark withdrew his name when it became evident that his appointment faced certain defeat. I think that my comment on the victory in the Atlantic still holds good:

It was a spontaneous and amazingly powerful reaction in defense of the American tradition of the separation of church and state. It was opposition to any move that might entangle America in any church-state alliance. The force of the protest was so overwhelming that I doubt whether any ambassador to the Holy See will be confirmed at Washington during this generation.

Many non-Catholics learned for the first time during this Vatican-ambassador controversy that the Catholic conception of the separation of church and state is quite distinct from the ordinary American conception. In the Catholic scheme of development, political power may theoretically be added to sectarian religious power without tainting the religious institution in any way with political significance.

For American Catholics there is nothing anomalous in venerating a religious leader who is both a priest and a statesman. The concepts of the sovereignty of the Catholic Church and the sovereignty of the Pope are welded together so closely by Father John Courtney Murray, the leading current writer on this theme in the American hierarchy, as "that negative, ill-defined, basically un-American that the average Catholic can scarcely make a distinction between political and religious programs. It is an understatement to say that the Roman Catholic Church is in politics. It is political. "Separation of church and state" is descriptive formula, with all its overtones of religious prejudice."

Father Murray later became the most advanced of the "liberal" Jesuit leaders in advocating accommodation of Catholic policy to American principles. But his voice is still, in the final analysis, the voice of the controlled hierarchy. In making such a statement Father Murray is simply echoing the official teachings of many Popes. Pius IX in Section 6 of his Syllabus denounced as one of "the principal errors of our time" the statement: "The Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church." In practice that means that the Catholic state and the Catholic Church function as one entity under one sovereign.

The funds for the world-wide network of political diplomacy are all controlled by the same absolute autocracy that controls the creation of saints and the administration of Catholic schools. The religious and political reports from bishops and nuncios all go to the same headquarters. So does the money; and the bishops render no accounting to their people for the expenditure of either religious or political funds. When Mary O'Brien of Montana puts a dollar in the collection plate for Peter's Pence, it may go toward the expense of the Papal nuncio in Paris, or the political drive for the Christian Democratic Party in Italy, or the cost of medical supplies for Dutch-Negro lepers in Paramaribo, or the living expenses of the Pope himself. American Catholic generosity in these matters is munificent and

undiscriminating. In a normal year, according to Thomas Sugrue, the Archdiocese of New York "contributes more money to the support of the Church of Rome than all of Europe."

Nobody knows how much of the Pope's funds go to religious and how much to political purposes—the distinction would be futile in any case because political and religious activities in the Roman system are inextricably mixed. The Church does not contribute as such to its string of Catholic political parties in Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, etc., but it accomplishes the same purpose by supporting Catholic Action groups which serve as the phalanxes of these parties. Official figures about the ownership of property and income are kept secret, so that nobody can speak with certainty about the Church's wealth and the proportion of that wealth which is used for political activities. A Catholic writer has estimated that the Papal court alone cost at least \$2,000,000 a year before World War II. That money, of course, was primarily American money.