CHRISTIAN SPAIN

ONE of the minor tragedies of the Spanish Civil War lies in the fact that Professor Dempf of Bonn was not able to give at Santander in 1936 his projected course of lectures on "Christian Political Philosophy in Spain." It is however no small compensation that he should have published these lectures, which are thereby communicated at present to all who understand German and, it is to be hoped, later to English-speaking readers.[1]

And behind this there is a greater hope yet. In reading the book one cannot refrain from asking again and again, "Will Spain which has so magnificent a Christian tradition, which has produced so many of the world's greatest political theorists, succeed this time after the agony of revolution and martyrdom in realizing the noblest ideas in practice and returning to the authentic Christian and Catholic outlook in politics?" Or will it be as before—a noble idealism existing side by side with an unintelligent hard realism personified in the classical figures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza? Dr. Dempf is content to remind us of the historic Spanish paradox, to express the hope that the Spanish people will rediscover themselves after the thunders of the civil war and then, as if preparing the way for return, to indicate with the insight and conciseness of a master the teaching of the great Spanish political theorists. For only by returning to the ideas built up by these men will Spain be able to re-establish a healthy political life.

It is not that the Spanish writers beginning with Vittoria advocate a party or political system which will solve all the world's ills. They are neither Liberal, Socialist nor Fascist, but they set forth those general principles which any government must observe in order to ensure social justice and honourable dealing both with its own subjects and with other nations. They, perhaps more than other group of writers, have built up a vast synthesis of political philosophy

1 Alois Dempf, *Christliche Staatsphilosophie in Spanien.* (Anton Pustet, Salzburg. 6 Austrian schillings.)

which is comparable to the common-sense metaphysics of the schoolmen; Vittoria for instance develops the Thomistic teaching and applies the metaphysics and moral philosophy of the schools to the sphere of politics. And as a return to common-sense is the only way to solve any problem so the political problems of the day can ultimately only be solved by the common-sense philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is that philosophy which is represented (apart from slight differences of detail) by the Spanish theorists.

Thus, while it leads to no definite party-allegiance, this book quietly refutes the errors of all the parties in providing a system by which the philosophies behind them may be tested.

Rousseau, the father of nineteenth-century Liberalism, is easily refuted by the Christian idea of man as perfectible but as at present imperfect. Marxist materialism has to give way before the Christian teaching of the primacy of the spiritual, and Hegel and others who influenced Fascist statolatry are shown to have flagrantly contradicted the truth that the State exists for the service of man and not vice-versa.

This political *philosophia perennis* is all the more admirable on account of the fact that those who helped to form it were to no small extent influenced by the movements of their time. It is admirable because, while appreciating the spirit of their age, these Spaniards were able to elevate themselves to view the State and political life *sub specie aeternitatis* and insisted always on the permanent moral obligations and the primacy of the spiritual amidst the changes and chances of this material world's strife.

First in the list of the constructors of this synthesis of Christian political philosophy Dr. Dempf rightly places Vittoria, whose magnificent achievement in the realm of international ethics has rather tended to obscure his notable contribution to the theory of the State. In his political theory Vittoria had actually in view the then existent wide-stretching Empire of Charles V and the conquests of Spain in the New World—hence his ideas on the law of nations are to a large extent part of his philosophy of the State. In the

true Thomist tradition however he was first and foremost a theologian and his teaching is inspired by the mediæval conception of the *lex aeterna* as the exemplar to which all other law must be conformed. Hence the natural community of peoples on which he insists is not to be identified either with the Universal Church or with the Hapsburg Empire. The Church's authority is limited to her own members and then only from the point of view of the spiritual; Vittoria, a century before Bellarmine, rejected the Church's direct power in temporals. Nor was the Emperor to be regarded as Lord of the world; the right of national self-determination was also recognized by Vittoria.

The basis of the world-community is ultimately the same as that of the national community, the need of men for one another which is part of their nature, created by God, and which is satisfied by certain free acts. But the natural law is fundamental and positive law only secures its fulfilment.

The State is from God in so far as He endows man with the natural impulse to enter into organized society and is distinguished from the Church by its end, which is happiness in this world. But it should be so organized that other groups, the family and certain functional associations retain full autonomy in their own sphere; Vittoria is also an advocate of the corporative State. The material cause of the State is the people, in the sense that all authority is for their good and dependent on their determination. As they are responsible for their welfare and have to bear the ills that afflict the nation, they must be able to control the person whose governmental acts involve them in good or evil fortune. But his authority ultimately comes from God. It must be used therefore in accordance with God's law, the moral order and with respect to the whole community of nations. Thus did Vittoria refute the doctrine of Macchiavelli, though he had not, like the later and better-known Grotius, seen the pernicious consequences of Macchiavellianism.

Suarez, coming between Vittoria and modern times, living in an age when Christendom had been broken up through the Reformation and the religious wars, retained the

essentials of the Scholastic tradition in politics but stressed certain aspects in order to refute contemporary errors. Against regal absolutism he maintained the contractual theory which, though it is vastly different from Rousseau's idea of the social contract, is perhaps more than a development of Vittoria's teaching. It is very clearly set forth by a recent German writer[2] as corresponding in political theory to the Molinist teaching on Grace in theology and as being opposed to the Dominican (and, in the present writer's opinion, Thomist) view in the same fashion, through the greater emphasis on human freedom.

This is not to deny the great contribution which he made to Catholic political philosophy nor to suggest that he and his associates were not worlds removed both from absolutist and liberal errors.

Even Mariana's admitted error on the subject of tyrannicide is shown to be such that it does not by any means render the rest of his philosophy unsound. It was due as much as anything to his acute appreciation of the ruin to which an irresponsible prince might lead his people. But this he sought to avoid by teaching the necessity of good relations between prince and people, the moderation of absolutism and a healthy economic administration which would bring the benefits of a mercantile age within the reach of all.

Certain followers of Mariana bring to an end the golden age of Scholastic political philosophy and, in closing this section of his book, Dr. Dempf rightly claims to have shown that there is a *philosophia perennis* on the fundamentals of which all these varied writers are agreed and that they were successful in re-establishing the permanent principles by their treatment of actual problems. "From the discovery of America to the rise of Mercantilism Spanish State-philosophy treated with astounding unanimity and sought to solve all the questions which arose at the opening of modern times." (p. 127.)

The last of the great Spaniards of whom he treats is unfortunately little known in England—Donoso Cortes, who was

2 Heinrich Rommen, *Der Staat in der katholischen Gedankenwelt.* (Bonifacius-Druckerei, Paderborn, 1935.)

Spanish Ambassador in Berlin in the middle of the last century. The time and place are both important, for here again we have a teacher who recalled the perennial philosophy of the State to solve the questions of the day which were profoundly affecting him. He saw the revolutionary movements of '48 and appreciated their lasting significance, he prophesied the rise of the masses, saw the ultimate struggle to be between Catholicism and Socialism and announced that the revolution which would change the face of Europe would begin either in London or St. Petersburg.[3]

As a contemporary of Kierke Gaard, with much of the latter's spirit, and in the fashion of De Maistre, Schlegel and Görres, he can be regarded as a lay-theologian or, better still, as a Christian philosopher, seeking to refute the errors inherited with all their practical consequences from the *Aufklärung* of the previous century. It is because he rejects rationalism that he is so implacable a foe of political Liberalism. Against the rational, naturalist view of the world, he takes up his standpoint from God's outlook and insists on the supernatural as the peak of a hierarchic order of things. He does not advocate a theocracy and in the truest Catholic spirit he is prepared to be loyal to any properly established régime which secures order in the State, but he prefers a system which will ensure the maintenance of supernatural values in their most perfect form. The best form of sovereignty is that which unites the various groups (again the corporative idea) in the one area and into one nation "whose symbol is the throne and whose personification is the king," and brings this nation along with other Catholic national units each with their Christian sovereign into the communion of the Church which gives order to the whole, "one through its supreme head, manifold in its members."

There is a failure to appreciate facts behind this grandiose conception, but it is expressive of a healthy desire to restore

3 See Franz Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Vol. IV. pp. 170-172, (Herder, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1937) for an excellent appreciation of Cortes.

balance to society and to combine reasonable freedom with proper authority. Undoubtedly, too, Cortes is correct when he sees the cause of actual political and social disorder to be in the last resort religious error.

There is little opportunity for political theorizing in the midst of civil war and the chaos which the latter leaves behind it demands the utmost strictness on the part of the established government. To set up an order corresponding to the principles laid down by the Spanish philosophers is impossible during the war and will be very difficult for a long time after it. But is there any hope of this? Is the struggle to end only with the extinction of Catholic Spain or will the nation continue to labour under the same cruel paradox (or rather, contradiction) between ideal and reality?

Certainly, if those who claim to support the Valencia government are successful there is no chance of their realizing the Catholic ideal of the State. But as it does not seem likely that they will be victorious, what can be expected from Franco? He has established order in the greater part of Spain even in the midst of present difficulties, he has spoken—and it seems sincerely—of his intention to promote social justice and revive the authentic Catholic spirit of Spain, there are evidences of his respect for the hierarchic order outlined by Cortes and he hopes to restore a corporative system such as all these great teachers have admired. But it is not sufficient in these days to accept such declarations at their face-value; one has to ask, "What do these words mean?" For words, even holy words—as the Pope has pointed out in his letter on National Socialism, are used to-day in vastly different senses by the political leaders. One cannot but fear that the Spanish nationalists are more influenced by the spirit of Fascism than by the teaching of their own Christian philosophers. Even though it may now be absolutely necessary to take their side to re-establish some order in the State, it would not be easy to show that Vittoria would have justified the revolt in the first place. And though one may discount exaggerated stories about the bombing of Guernica, there can be no doubt that the conduct of the war

through the inhumanity of Franco's allies if not of his own immediate followers, could not possibly satisfy the conditions of Catholic Moral Theology. It is said that Franco has threatened to exile "political priests," an expression which at worst recalls the early days of Nazism and at best seems to be taking into the hands of the State a power which properly belongs to the Church. Lastly, there is such confusion of thought on the subject of corporativism that even the best-informed often seem to think that the Fascist corporate State is identical with the more democratic corporative system advocated by Catholic sociologists.

This is not to take sides against Franco but merely to give reasons why we cannot expect an ideal Catholic State to be formed at once after the struggle. We can however hope that what does emerge will ultimately form itself into a system more in accordance with the Spanish and Catholic tradition than anything that we see to-day and that the paradox will finally disappear through the reunion of the religious and national elements. In that restoration these teachers will certainly participate to no small degree and it will be mainly due to their influence if there returns the ancient spirit: *Hispanidad y Cristianidad.*

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