THE ATHANASIAN

A publication of Traditional Catholics of America † Editor: Fr. Francis E. Fenton, STL † Volume VIII, No. 7 † October 15, 1987

CHURCH AND STATE: UNITED OR SEPARATE?

John Kenneth Weiskittel

Through much of this year America is celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the U.S. Constitution. The greatness of this document derives in large part from the abilities of the Founding Fathers to balance government power with the rights of individuals. It is proof positive that they did not seek to form a tyranny.

A group calling itself the Committee on the Constitutional System (CCS) would cast an ominous shadow not only on the festivities but also on the nation's future if it is given the chance to tinker with the Constitution. Made up largely of the elitist internationalist establishment (including 15 members of the semi-secret Council on Foreign Relations on its board of directors), the CCS seeks Constitutional "reforms" that represent a radical shift of power away from the electorate and into the hands of the politicians.

Clearly, the Constitution is in danger and, with it, our freedoms. As Roman Catholics who have seen it protect our God-given right to practice our faith freely and unmolested, we are duty-bound to see that it comes to no harm. Yet, in our defense of it, let us not lose sight of the fact that neither it nor the country it helped to engender are ideal by the Church's standards. Separation of Church and State (or separatism) has never been the mind of the Roman Catholic Church.

It may come as a surprise to many Catholics to learn that the admiration exhibited by Pope Leo XIII for the United States, though warm and friendly, was not without a reminder that the country falls short of the mark in some respects. When, in 1895, that excellent pontiff addressed the Church in America with the encyclical, *Longinqua Oceani Spatia,* he noted with tempered praise:

> ...thanks are due to the equity of the laws which obtain in America and to the customs of the well-ordered republic. For the Church amongst you, fettered by no hostile legislation, protected against violence by the common laws and the impartiality of the tribunals, is free to live and act without hindrance. Yet, though all this is true, *it would be erroneous to draw the conclusion that in America is to be sought the type of the most desirable status of the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced.* The fact that Catholicity with you is in good condition, nay, is even enjoying a prosperous growth, is by all means to be attributed to the fecundity with which God has endowed His Church, in virtue of which, unless men or circumstances interfere, she spontaneously expands and propagates herself; *but, she would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority.* (emphasis added)

It is difficult to see how anyone reading Pope Leo's words could conclude that he viewed the United States as being a model for Church-State relations, much less a Catholic nation. But the patriotic fervor of many American Catholics has, for generations, blinded them to the distinctions made by this pope and others on the subject. This widespread ignorance of traditional Church teachings of the proper roles of civil and ecclesiastical governments and of their interrelationship has led to confusion over how the Catholic should interact with American society; in some cases it has caused a disordering of an individual's spiritual and temporal identities.

The greatest rulers of the Middle Ages—the Age of Faith—were those who acknowledged the Catholic Church as the supreme power on earth and ever worked to order their nations according to the social teachings of Christ. Many combined this with lives of highest sanctity, and those canonized include Saint Louis IX, King of France; Saint Casmir, King of Poland; Saint Henry II, Emperor of Germany and Saint Edward the Confessor, King of England. And there have been rulers in later centuries as well who placed their thrones at the service of God. Spain's Ferdinand and Isabella were highly esteemed for their support of the Church and its mission. Referring to the period during and immediately after their reign, Monsignor John Tracy Ellis writes:

> The recent conquest of the Moors, the concessions granted to the Spanish crown by the Holy See over the management of ecclesiastical affairs, and the fact that Spain was unquestionably the greatest Catholic power in Europe set in conflict with the rising Protestant states—all helped to stamp upon every Spanish enterprise the seal of Catholic energy. Such zeal appears, indeed, in the first entry that Columbus made in his famous journal where he remarked that, among the common aims of his voyage, one was to contact the native peoples so that he might observe what he termed "the manner in which may be undertaken their conversion to our Holy Faith." It is likewise evident in almost every major patent granted by the crown for settlement in the New World; for example, when Charles V in June, 1523, outlined for Vasquez de Ayllon the objectives he was to pursue in his conquest of Florida, the conversion of the Indians to Catholicism was described as "the chief motive you are to bear and hold in this affair, and to this end it is proper that religious persons should accompany you." (*American Catholicism,* University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 3-4)

Such harmonious collaboration of spiritual and secular powers towards a common goal is at the heart of the Catholic ideal of Church-State relations.

The theology behind the Catholic doctrine here is clear-cut, well-articulated and is professed by many saints and popes (Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Robert Bellarmine, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Bernard, Pope Saint Pius X, to name a few). Briefly outlined, it may be said that the Church and State are seen as two independent powers (though not, as we will see, absolutely so), each with authority given by God and each supreme in its particular rule. Accordingly, Saint Thomas, citing Our Lord's "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's..." (Matthew 22:21), declared that, in purely civil matters, temporal government is to be obeyed rather than spiritual but, in those matters concerning the salvation of our souls, "the secular power is subject to the spiritual in so far as it has been placed under it by God." (*Comment. in II Sent.*, dist. 44) In *De Romano Pontifice* (1610) Saint Robert Bellarmine makes this analogy: "These two powers, ecclesiastical and civil, are related to each other in the same way as spirit and flesh are in men." Now, when flesh gains the upper hand over spirit in man, we rightly observe that there is a disorder in that person, for we are so created that our proper end is to seek the things that are of God. To do this—even in temporal things—we are obligated to keep this end in sight and, at times, the spirit may command the flesh to do things it would ordinarily rebel against (for example, fasting and other penances). This obligation carries over into society and the Church may rightfully command the State when the spiritual welfare of her children is at stake. Thus Saint Robert writes:

> (T)he political power has its princes, laws and judgments, etc.; similarly, the ecclesiastical power has its bishops, canons and judgments. The political power has, as its end, temporal peace; the ecclesiastical power has, for its end, eternal salvation. Sometimes they are found separated, as before, in the times of the Apostles; and sometimes, they are found together, as now. When they are joined together they form one body and, therefore, ought to be joined together as the inferior should be subject to and subordinated to the superior. And so the spiritual power does not get involved in temporal business, but permits it all to go on in the way it did before they were joined together, provided the temporal business does not obstruct the spiritual end or is not necessary for obtaining the spiritual end. Should either of these cases arise, however, then the spiritual power can and must force the temporal power by every reason and method towards that which it deems necessary. (ibid)

Practically speaking, then, this means that the Church has a very real, though limited, authority in temporal affairs. It is part of the papacy's divine right, Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., states in *The Mystical Body of Christ & the Reorganization of Society*, "as Supreme Teacher and Guardian of the Moral Law, to give to Rulers, with regard to the government of their States, directions obliging in conscience."

Truly, it is symptomatic of the doctrinal muddiness that has plagued the Church in our nation long before Vatican II that this fundamental teaching has been viewed as backward and lamentable by so many American Catholics. Even Father Bertrand L. Conway, in his otherwise often excellent *The Question Box* (Paulist Press, 1929, pp. 187-189), argues away the teachings of Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX by suggesting that the medieval union of Church and State was merely a passing phase, that it didn't really represent the Catholic ideal and that the status of the Church in America is as good as it is anywhere, if not better. As we shall see, however, the Church does not take this blasé view of the subject, but looks with much concern over the dangers inherent in the separatist State.

The Basis Of The Liberal Society

In 1804, Pope Pius VII received word that France's proud young leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, desired approval by the Holy See of his claim to the title "emperor," wishing the pontiff to lend his august presence at a solemn coronation ceremony at Notre Dame Cathedral. Pope Pius was reluctant to do this but he was persuaded that perhaps a revitalization of Christendom could thus be effected. He exacted from Napoleon promises that he would honor the Concordat signed in 1801, and restore the Papal States to Rome (pledges the dictator would later break). The pope would, he was told by Napoleon's representatives, both anoint and crown the "new Charlemagne" but, hours before the December coronation, Pius learned a change had been made in the procedure. "In the climax of the impressive ceremony in Notre Dame," writes historian Charles Breunig, "Napoleon took the crown from the pope, turned his back upon him and, facing the audience, placed the crown upon his own head. In this manner he proclaimed to the pope and to all others present his independence of any earthly authority." (*The Age of Revolution and Reaction: 1789-1850*, Norton, 1977, p. 85) Better, perhaps, than any other single act, the arrogant impiety of Napoleon symbolizes the modern Liberal rebellion to the Church's divinely-mandated prerogatives.

Aside from a few isolated instances, it was not until the Renaissance that a movement of defiance was initiated against the Christian social order. The first major attacks came from Martin Luther and Henry VIII. Luther's theory of Church and State was a logical outcome of his errors concerning God and Man. In his denial of sanctifying grace and its work in the regeneration of the soul, Luther claimed that the Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary acted merely as a shield between the sinner and his angry God. Man could not achieve holiness even with the help of Our Lord, and so the best that could be hoped for was to hide this corruption through faith because the works of man would always reek of sin and be offensive to the Almighty. This sharp delineation of man into two warring parts—believer and sinner—had natural implications in politics, and so Luther instructed rulers:

> You are a prince or a judge...you have people under you and you wish to know what to do. It is not Christ you are to question concerning the matter but the law of your country... Between the Christian and the ruler, a profound separation must be made...Assuredly, a prince can be a Christian, but it is not as a Christian that he ought to govern. As a ruler, he is not called a Christian but a prince. The man is a Christian, but his function does not concern his religion...Though they are found in

the same man, the two states or functions are perfectly marked off one from another, and really opposed. (cited, Father Fahey, op cit, p. 275—Shades of Ted Kennedy and Geraldine Ferraro!)

Other "reformers" had, no doubt, articulated the same separatist system before him but, because of his greater influence, Luther can fairly be called the father of this theory.

Luther placed the State *above* the Church and he pushed the "exaltation of the civil authority to the degree of absolution..." (Father Newman C. Eberhardt, C.M., *A Summary of Catholic History*, Vol. II, Herder, 1962, p. 145) "Accordingly, each Protestant State," writes Father Fahey, "after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, expressed this separatist ideal by organizing its national form of religion as a State Department." (op cit, p. 275) More than a century before, this absolutist assault on Catholicism had spread west from Germany to England when, in 1534, King Henry VIII's Parliament decreed in the Act of Supremacy that "the king our sovereign lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall be taken, accepted, and reputed the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England..." Within a year, many Catholics were executed for refusing to take the accompanying oath, including a bishop, Saint John Fisher, and the king's ex-chancellor, Saint Thomas More. (Father Eberhardt, ibid, p. 190)

And so, in the persons of Luther and Henry Tudor the rending of Christendom began in earnest, a process seen today in a world where the modern Liberal state, behind many guises, reigns supreme, and where religion, if permitted at all, is often either an arm of the government (Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark, etc.) and Catholicism is only tolerated; or where, as in the U.S., the error of religious liberty allows public morality to be based *not* on the solid rock of Catholic teaching but on the shifting sands of opinion polls. Liberalism, the ideology behind these states, preaches that "liberty" is the highest good for man, a premise utterly against the Catholic truth that assures us that free will is a means to an end (that end being to carry out the will of God).

It is hardly startling, then, to discover that Freemasonry, that great bastion of Liberalism, has always championed separatism (save in those nations where they are able to impose heretical state churches or, as in Mexico, a brutally atheistic, anti-Catholic regime). This follows from their dogma that people have a "right" to believe in any religion that they choose, that religions are all equally pleasing to God and, therefore, that no religious body—particularly the Roman Catholic Church—has the supreme authority to bind by moral teachings the consciences of men as individuals, as citizens or as lawmakers. Where do these doctrines lead? Pope Leo XIII, in the encyclical *Humanum Genus*, states, regarding the Masons and their kindred, that *"it is indisputably evident that their ultimate aim is to root out completely the whole religious and social order of the world which has been set up by Christianity and to replace it by another in harmony with their way of thinking. This will mean that the foundations and laws of the new structure will be drawn from pure Naturalism."* (emphasis added) (Naturalism is the system that holds it to be impossible for grace to raise our nature to the supernatural order and that, therefore, nature and reason can be our only guides.) How well have they been able to actualize this aim? Those who ask need look no further than to the pages of their daily newspaper for the answer.

A Nation Under God?

The Declaration of Independence states that men are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights," including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Constitution makes no direct reference to God (aside from "in the year of our Lord") but in its First Amendment denies Congress the power to legislate on "an establishment of religion" or to restrict its "free exercise." *The Federalist Papers* (writings of three Founding Fathers—Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison—to defend and outline the philosophy underlying the Constitution, and called third "among all the sacred writings of American political history" by historian Clinton Rossiter) fill a 500-page book, but mention of God is limited to *three* brief references, morality in government to *two* and religion to *four*. (Mentor, 1961 ed.)

Nowhere in any of these documents do we find any expression of an intention to form a nation on specifically *Christian* social principles. Other information from the era shows rather clearly that they did *not* so intend. Thomas Jefferson is well-known for demanding a "wall of separation" to break up "this loathsome combination of Church and State." His Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom from 1779 was intended to "comprehend within the mantle of its protection the Jew and Gentile, the Christian and Muslim, the Hindu, and the infidel of every denomination" and, years later, he wrote that he was glad to see Jewish citizens preparing to take their seats "at the board of government." And the Washington Administration officially declared in the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli: *"The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."* (emphasis added)

For Catholics in Colonial America the prospect of freedom from persecution was an undeniable blessing. When Father John Carroll was named the nation's first bishop in 1789, Catholics accounted for only one percent (about 40,000 out of four million) of its population. Hostility—as often as not, *undisguised*—was their daily cross. The blessing of liberty was welcome, to be sure, but it did not come without a "catch": in exchange for the right to practice their religion unmolested, Catholics would have to accept, as Colonel Oliver North might put it, "the good, the bad and the ugly" of Americanism. Consequently, the separation-of-Church-and-State doctrine has become, for many, almost as much an article of faith as the Real Presence or the Immaculate Conception. One chronicler, the Jewish scholar Will Herberg, speaks of this as being part of "the Americanization of American Catholicism" in his *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Doubleday Anchor, 1960 ed., p. 150), while remarking:

> The conventional position, affirming the union of church and state on the model of the Catholic monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, still remained normative in the manuals, but the pronouncements of prelates, and more recently the writings of theologians, began to take a new line, obviously reflecting American conditions.

Herberg notes that Bishops John Carroll and John England were early separatists and quotes Cardinal James Gibbons ("separation of church in this country seems...the natural, inevitable, and best conceivable plan") and Archbishop John T. McNicholas ("If tomorrow Catholics constituted a majority in our country, they would not seek a union of church and state...") to show that support for the system continued without qualification. (ibid)

When shepherds lead, the sheep follow. Nowhere is this brought out better than in the presidential candidacies of Democrats Al Smith in 1928 and John F. Kennedy in 1960. Smith, the first Catholic ever nominated for President by a major party, attempted to deflect charges that he would become, if elected, a hostage to Vatican directives. Concerning the makeup of his cabinet as governor of New York he said:

> ...It was composed, under my appointment, of two Catholics, thirteen Protestants, and one Jew. The man closest to me in the administration...is a Protestant, a Republican, and a thirty-second-degree Mason. In my public life I have exemplified that complete separation of Church from State which is the faith of American Catholics today. (cited, Richard O'Connor, *The First Hurrah: A Biography of Alfred E. Smith*, Putnam, 1970, pp. 180-81)

Unable to shake the "papist" label, Smith was easily defeated by Herbert Hoover. Thirty-two years later, Kennedy successfully disposed of the tag himself by stating: "I am not the Catholic candidate for President." (cited, *The New York Times* staff, *The Kennedy Years*, Viking, 1964, p. 76) "If any Pope attempted to influence me as President, I would have to tell him it was completely improper," he declared. "...If you took orders from the Pope, you would be breaking your oath of office...and commit a sin against God...You would be subject to impeachment and should be impeached." (cited, Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, Harper & Row, 1965, p. 145) Kennedy said he favored "absolute" Church-State separation, as is well illustrated by Sorensen:

> ...the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* told Catholics that the Church "has the duty and the right" to tell them how to vote. Vatican "sources" were reported as stating that the editorial applied to Americans as well as others...The Senator (Kennedy) issued a statement that his support of church-state separation "is not subject to change under any conditions." Privately he remarked, "Now I understand why Henry VIII set up his own church..." (ibid, pp. 148, 190)

How *should* a Catholic candidate have handled the issue? Simply with such a pledge as: "I will *not* seek the advice of the Pope on how I select my cabinet, levy taxes, conduct foreign diplomacy or dispose of other policy matters, but I *do* intend to avail myself of encyclicals and other Church writings so that I can *formulate* my policies in accord with Catholic social teachings." This satisfies both the Church's requirement of a union of *intent* between spiritual and temporal spheres and the State's insistence of no *direct* ecclesiastical influence. It is the only manner in which a Catholic in America (or any other non-Catholic country) can hold office and remain true to Christ's Kingship.

Restoring Christ To Public Life

That religious values are in a process of erosion in the United States is beyond dispute, having largely been displaced by "do-goodism," hedonism and secular humanism. The French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel, writing just after World War II, said that Christians must put themselves on the side of America in the fight against totalitarianism, but cautioned:

> ...still, that does not authorize us to say in a simple and straightforward way that the United States is the champion of Christian civilization; for after all, from many points of view, the "way of life" practiced and preached across the Atlantic is very far from conforming to the demands of the Gospels. All that one can say, all that one can concede, is that on the American side, freedom, in spite of everything, does retain opportunities which in the other camp, for an indefinite period, appear to be completely lost. (*Man Against Mass Society*, Regnery Gateway, 1962 ed., p. 246)

Today's situation is far more grievous, as the separatist "ideal" is being used more and more to form a totally secularized society. We must not hesitate to remind all who will listen that the Founding Fathers established a nation on the fundamental truth that all persons have *God-given rights.* But more importantly, we must remind them that *God, too, has His rights, and that He is in the supreme position to avenge violations against them.*

Over its 211 years America has been the *great experiment* in religious and political "ecumenism" but in this we see, at best, an awkward truce and, at worst, the seeds of dissolution. For how can there be the highest unity of purpose where there is not unity of belief? As Our Lord told the scribes: "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." (Mark 3:24) In his encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, Pope Pius XII discusses the implications of banishing Christ from the affairs of state: "Once the authority of God and the sway of His law are denied in this way, the civil authority as an inevitable result tends to attribute to itself that absolute autonomy which belongs exclusively to the Supreme Maker." Is this not what we see in a court that sinfully debases the blessed institution of maternity by approving abortions?

The Conciliar Church has aided this destructive process by promoting the heresy of religious liberty and has even encouraged historically Catholic countries (for example, Columbia) to voluntarily transform themselves into separatist states. Such a system, in America or elsewhere, weakens the proper view of Catholicism, so well expressed by the French Catholic editor, Louis Veuillot, over a century ago:

> The children of the Christ, the children of the King, are kings. They form an absolutely superior society, whose duty is to take possession of the earth and reign over it for the purpose of baptizing all men and of raising them to that selfsame supernatural life, that selfsame royalty and that selfsame glory for which Christ has destined them... For the liberty that is man's due is liberty to attain his

supernatural end, which is union with Christ; and *the only society ever known to recognize all men as equals and brothers is the society of the disciples of Christ.* (emphasis added; Hans Kohn ed., *Making of the Modern French Mind*, Van Nostrand Anvil, 1955, pp. 170-171)

In a word, then, traditional Catholics must reassert themselves as members of the *Church Militant.* We must, while showing respect for the beliefs of others, act as a leaven for *Catholic change* in our communities, and we must state in no uncertain terms that the only means for genuine progress in society is to be found in following the principles enunciated by the Church.

And we need to reach those Catholics overly enamored with the *American* system and to convince them that it is in no way unpatriotic to hold pious reservations about our current Church-State setup or even to long for a day when it can be said that the United States is a Catholic nation (just as we ought ardently to hope for a time when the benign Reign of Christ engulfs the world with the flame of His Divine Love). No, the division we see cannot be regarded as the ideal but *only* as an *expedient arrangement.* If they challenge us on this, will they also dispute Pope Saint Pius X's encyclical, *Vehementer Nos?* It states:

> That Church and State ought to be separated is *an absolutely false and pernicious error.* Based as it is on the principle that the State should not make a profession of any religious worship, this doctrine is, first of all, *a grave insult to Almighty God.* For the Creator of mankind is also *the Founder of human societies,* and He preserves them just as He maintains individuals in existence. *To give Him due honor, we owe Him then not only private veneration but public and social worship.* Besides, this thesis involves *the unconcealed denial of the supernatural order.* It limits the actions of the state *exclusively* to the pursuit of public prosperity during this life, though this is only the proximate *raison d'etre* of political societies... Since the present temporal order of things is *subordinate* to the conquest of man's supreme and absolute good, *eternal happiness, the civil authority ought not only not to hinder that victory but should efficaciously contribute thereto.* (emphasis added) †

Pray the Rosary Daily

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The issue of this newsletter of one year ago (October 15, 1986) contained a four-page article on the above-named individual by John K. Weiskittel. As a reprint it sold over 7,000 copies. Some three months from now the national holiday in King's honor will again be observed (what a disgrace!). On the very safe assumption that the abominable lie machine known as the American news media will release another propaganda barrage on his behalf, we are again making available this excellent expose of the *real* Martin Luther King, Jr. It would be a pipe dream to imagine that this one piece could bring about any substantial reversal of the favorable opinion about him held by the generality of Americans. Yet at least a step or two might be made in that direction if our newsletter subscribers will help us to get the article as widely circulated as possible. That there is a national holiday in honor of King is but one more sorrowful example of the depths of moral decadence to which this nation has sunk.

In the article a number of individuals have been designated as Communists. Due to space limitations the confirming documentation has been omitted. Anyone desiring such documentation may obtain it by writing to the address below. Additional copies of the article may be purchased at the following prices:

2 copies for $ 1.00 (minimum order)
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In an address before 1,800 "black Catholics" in New Orleans on Saturday, September 12, John Paul II referred to the "providential role" played by Martin Luther King, Jr., in the civil rights movement. Isn't John Paul II aware of the true character and pro-Communist record of King? I'm strongly inclined to think that "His Holiness" is well aware of it.

Fr. F. Fenton

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL

Jill Wiesner

Born on Easter Tuesday, 1576, in the little farm village of Pouii in southern France, Vincent was the third of six children of Jean de Paul and Bertrande de Moras. Although, like other farm families, the de Pauls were poor, they always seemed to have enough to share with those who were destitute.

Emulating the generosity of his parents, Vincent's love for the poor began in his childhood. On one occasion he gave his entire purse of 30 sous to a poor tramp even though it had taken him a long time to save that much.

Recognizing his piety and intelligence as more than ordinary, Vincent's father arranged to send him to the Franciscan school at Dax. From there Vincent went on to the University of Toulouse, France's top university in civil and canon law, supporting himself by tutoring. After being ordained to the priesthood in 1600 and graduating with a degree in theology, he worked to acquire a benefice on which he could live comfortably. (Good and honest priest though he was, Vincent was not yet immune to worldly ambition.)

In 1609, Father Vincent was sent to Paris by his superior where he was shocked to see the Faith treated so carelessly. Worldly clergy resisted the reforms of the Council of Trent, handing out abbeys and bishoprics to those with political influence, including laymen. Four abbeys were even ruled by a Huguenot (Calvinist), a perquisite of his position as Minister of Finance. The Mass itself suffered from the resulting confusion, as Vincent related years later:

> I noticed seven or eight priests, all saying Mass differently; one did it one way, another in another way; there was such a diversity that you would have wept to see it.

But Vincent also came to know priests like Cardinal Pierre Berulle, whose "equal could hardly be found for solid piety and learning," and the Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales, whom he regarded "as the man of our times whose life copied most closely the earthly life of the Son of God." Francis de Sales also thought highly of Vincent de Paul, choosing him as the superior and spiritual director of the Visitation Sisters, the Order founded by Saint Francis and the widowed Madame Jane Frances de Chantal.

In 1612, Cardinal Berulle sent Father Vincent as chaplain to the family of Phillipe-Emmanuel de Gondi, General of the Royal Galleys. Though the de Gondis were of high rank and had many obligations, they were a good family and eager to help their chaplain wherever they could. During a visit to their country estates, Madame de Gondi suggested that Father Vincent preach a mission to their tenants. His instructions were so eagerly received that he was asked to preach in more and more villages. Father Vincent saw that a more permanent system of instruction was needed. Thus began the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission (approved by the Holy See in 1633), whose purpose was to instruct the country people in the truths of their Faith. Father Vincent based the rules for the Congregation on those of the Society of Jesus.

In 1617, the Abbé Vincent de Paul was sent to Chatillon-les-Dombes, a large, thoroughly run-down parish. The church buildings had fallen into such disrepair that the rectory was uninhabitable and Father Vincent was forced to lodge with a Huguenot. The parishioners were indifferent to their Faith; many of them had become Huguenots.

His work among prisoners showed him the need for missionary care on a consistent basis. Though the Ladies of Charity had helped in many ways, a congregation of women was needed who could dedicate themselves completely to being "Servants of the Poor." Father Vincent founded the Daughters of Charity, choosing as their head a young widow named Louise de Marillac. These Sisters returned kindness for insults and gentleness for abuse. Whether among the convicts, in the charity hospitals, helping in the home Father Vincent established for abandoned infants or in the Vincentian home for the elderly poor—the Daughters of Charity in their gray habits were, as their founder trained them, "the visible guardian angels of the sick and suffering."

As Vincent de Paul worked to win France back to the Faith through spiritual and corporal works of mercy, a Dutch professor at Louvain University, who later became Bishop of Ypres, published a book called *Augustinus* in which he claimed to have discovered in the writings of Saint Augustine the doctrine that God sometimes refuses to give sufficient grace to obey His commands—that some souls are predestined for salvation; others have no hope. The professor, Cornelius Jansen, attracted a large following which included the Abbé of Cyran, a friend of Father Vincent who continually tried to engage the Abbé de Paul in discussions about Janesnism, telling him that "the Church has not existed for the past five or six centuries." To which Father Vincent replied, "Do you expect me to believe a single Doctor of Theology like yourself in preference to the teaching Church, the pillar of Truth with whom Christ promised to remain until the end of time?"

As Jansenism spread throughout France, many people abstained from the Sacraments, believing themselves unworthy. Jansenist priests encouraged them in this, urging them to wait to receive the Holy Eucharist until just before death. Despair reigned where hope had flourished.

Father Vincent de Paul worked to have Jansen's "five propositions" condemned by the bishops, 85 of whom wrote to Pope Innocent X, asking him to formally condemn Jansenism. The pope did so in 1655.

In September of 1660, Father Vincent fell ill but no one took it seriously because he had been troubled for several years by intermittent fevers. This time, however, he grew steadily weaker until he had to be carried in his chair to the chapel. On

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ON CREATING SINS

Fr. Francis E. Fenton

Mortal sin is the greatest evil in the world—and venial sin the second greatest. Such is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Of the two, the former, because of its nature and consequences, is exceedingly the more serious. To avoid all sin is a prime concern of those who truly love God. The more fervent their love, the more profound their concern. And so it is hardly surprising that the avoidance of sin and its occasions so strikingly characterizes the lives of the saints. Having an intense love for God and a keen sense of moral evil, sin was abhorrent to them and, with the grace of God, they were willing to give up their very lives rather than commit it. Indeed, "death rather than sin" was the motto of at least one of them, Saint Dominic Savio. And so many of the martyrs throughout the history of the Church became martyrs because they freely chose death rather than sin (denying the Faith, impurity, etc.).

To have a vivid awareness of sin (and particularly grave sin) and a firm determination to avoid it and its proximate occasions must surely be a distinctive mark of the genuine, that is, traditional Roman Catholic. And, while it is hard to imagine that there ever was a time when the moral obligation to avoid sin posed more of a challenge than it does in this our day, yet the obligation remains in full force and the grace of God is always sufficient. Whatever God commands or wills, He gives the grace to accomplish. If this were not true, then the Almighty would not be the all-good and all-merciful God we believe and know Him to be. Admittedly, obeying God, doing the will of God does not come easy to fallen human nature but, the more the effort required to do so, the more difficult the sacrifice—then, to that extent, the more authentic and concrete is one's love for God. The Son of God spoke very clearly and without qualification: "If you love Me, keep My Commandments"; "If anyone love Me, he will keep My word."

But, this article being written specifically with traditional Roman Catholics in mind, to get to the point which suggested and clarifies its title, "On Creating Sins." Many articles on the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Church which have appeared in these pages over the past several years presuppose that the Roman Catholic reading them knows the teaching of the Church on the matter being treated. That presumption is not always justified though and the present topic is a case in point. Because of its broad scope a lengthy piece could be written on the subject. Due to lack of sufficient space, however, this article will discuss but one phase of it: the lack of knowledge of the Faith in relation to sin. Whether one's ignorance, in general or in a particular case, be culpable or not, the simple fact of the matter is that numerous Catholics do not know the teachings of the Church on the vital subject of sin—and, specifically here, what constitutes sin or what are the conditions necessary for one to be guilty of sin. (Any more or less complete treatment of the matter would take scrupulosity into account but that is outside the scope of this article.)

Because of the supreme gravity of mortal sin it is the profound concern of every conscientious Roman Catholic to avoid at all costs such sin and its proximate occasions. But to accomplish this he must obviously know what the conditions for mortal sin are, namely, serious matter, sufficient reflection and full consent of the will. Nor is a person guilty of mortal sin unless all three of these conditions are present in any particular instance. Whether it be thought, word, deed or omission, it is impossible to commit mortal sin otherwise. How exceedingly regrettable, then, that some people, because of ignorance of the Church's teaching on the subject, accuse themselves or think they are guilty of grave moral fault when, in fact, there is *objectively* no mortal sin because of the absence or one or more of the requisites for such sin. *Subjectively*, however, an individual *is* guilty of mortal sin if, for example, he believes, though erroneously, that this or that is seriously immoral and nonetheless knowingly and willingly proceeds to do it or say it or think it. Hence, the obligation we have both to form a correct conscience on matters of morality (one, that is, in harmony with the mind of the Church) and to think and speak and act in conformity with that conscience.

Mortal sin, again, is the paramount evil in the world, bar none. How imperative it is, then, not only to avoid those which the Church holds to be such but to refrain as well from "creating" others as a result of our ignorance of the Church's moral teaching. There are enough, the Lord knows, without our inventing more in one way or another. The three conditions requisite for mortal sin are clearly spelled out in any traditional adult catechism: serious matter (something gravely immoral); sufficient reflection (the person knows or at least strongly suspects that the matter in question is gravely sinful); and full consent of the will. We cannot, obviously, commit a mortal sin accidentally nor, strictly understood, even a venial sin for that matter.

A number of examples could be cited to illustrate the point of this article, examples, that is, of sins which some Catholics create through ignorance of their religion. Without going into detail on them, they would include: the obligation of attending Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation; the obligation relating to the laws of fast and abstinence; the sinfulness or lack of it in taking God's name in vain; the distinction between temptation and sin in, say, impure thoughts; the rosary. (The rosary? It is among the most popular and highly indulgenced of all the sacramentals of the Church; its history is a glorious one; its faithful and devout recitation each day is, in my opinion, one of the distinctive signs of a truly traditional Roman Catholic. But if such a Catholic never recited the rosary, is this neglect in itself a mortal, or even a venial, sin? It is not. Yet there are some who think it is. Despite the great and justifiable emphasis on the importance of the rosary—and especially in this our day—I am not aware of the Church ever declaring that any sin was involved in a person's neglect to recite it.)

Perhaps the above example of the rosary helps to clarify what I am trying to say in this article. The obligation is incumbent upon every Roman Catholic to know his Faith. But many do not, a condition particularly noticeable as regards the moral teachings of the Church. The consequence of this lack of

knowledge is that they do not have a correct conscience on moral matters. And the practical consequence of this is that they consider certain matters sinful which, for one reason or another, are not—or they consider certain matters as gravely sinful which are but venially so. (The relative gravity of venial sin must not be minimized for, according to the mind of the Church, it is, to repeat, the second greatest evil in the world.) In view of the manifold sins already on the books, how very unfortunate it is that some Catholics, through ignorance of the Faith, "create" or invent additional sins. To correct this situation should, of itself, be a strong incentive to know their Faith on the part of those to whom it applies.

The duty Roman Catholics have of knowing their religion does not mean that they must become theologians. It does mean that they are morally bound to work at learning their God-given Faith to the best of their ability—and to give top priority to living it in their daily lives. The good Lord knows supremely well the finite limitations we all have and He will take them all into account in the infinitely just and merciful judgment He will one day render to each and every one of us.

The ultimate tragedy of life is not its sufferings nor its injustices. Nor is it death. No, the ultimate tragedy of life is the loss of our immortal souls and this can come about in one way only—through our own grave fault, through our deliberate failure sincerely to repent of mortal sin before death. †

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"SMOKING OR NON-SMOKING?"

THE ATHANASIAN

Published by Traditional Catholics of America

Eight issues a year: (Jan. 15, Mar. 1, Apr. 15, June 1, July 15, Sept. 1, Oct. 15, Dec. 1)
Subscriptions: $ 8.00 per year (via First Class Mail) for the USA, Canada and Mexico; $12.00 per year (via Air Mail) for all other countries
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