Church and State: A Conflicting Collaboration

Valentine Ugochukwu Iheanacho

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1996-8527

University of the Free State

valmsp73@gmail.com

Abstract

St Jerome, both in his wittiness and in his critique of the romance between the church of his time and the Roman Empire in the fifth century, believed that "The church by its connection with Christian princes gained in power and riches, but lost in virtues." The church and the state, whether in the past or in the present, have two particular things in common: peace and order. Both institutions detest disorder and rebellion, but ironically, in their efforts to bring about the desired peace and order, they often disturbed the peace through their quarrels and quibbles. With a keen sense of history, this essay studies the reluctance with which the church in the West and in the East embraced secular authorities in the civil administration of society for the sake of "peace" and "order."

Keywords: religion and politics; empire; papacy; plenitude of power; Byzantine and Russian Orthodox Churches

Introduction

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) wrote his political masterpiece, *De Monarchia,* during his exile at the time of great political turmoil in his native city state of Florence. Dante was a contemporary of Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303), who at the pinnacle of the temporal power of the medieval papacy, wrote the German king, Albert of Habsburg in 1303: "As the moon has no light except what it receives from the sun, so no earthly power has anything except what it receives from ecclesiastical authority."[1] It was a bold assertion tinged with pontifical presumption which arrogated to itself the plenitude of power for the "maintenance" of peace and order. No one at the time quarrelled about the fact that peace and order were basic requisites for the general welfare of everyone in what was then known as *corpus Christianum.* The controversy rather concerned the organisation of society in order to facilitate the attainment of peace. Dante, himself, in *De Monarchia* Book I, identified peace

1 Norman Shaifer and Marie F. Porters (eds), *Patristic Heritage in the Renaissance and Modern World* (New York: Shepherd Press, 1990), 27.

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as the medium to arrive at happiness, which in his estimation was the deepest longing of the human heart.[2]

The marriage or the quarrel between church and state has occurred in forms of polarity and similitude like two kingdoms: heavenly and earthly; state and church, *imperium* and *sacerdotium*, spiritual and temporal. While the historical contexts and conditions may have changed, the core of the matter has largely remained the same because the territories of the priest and the politician do inevitably overlap.[3] For its own part, the church faces a continuous dilemma. How far must it intervene in civil affairs before it incurs the accusation of having overstepped its bounds? And how little must it do for her to be denounced for being otherworldly and less interested in the political, economic and social welfare of the society?

Reluctant Pacesetters

The early Christians were somewhat sceptical about any temporal establishment or earthly kingdom. They had a foreshortened view of history, with their attention focused on the imminent second coming of Christ. The excitement about the future reign of Christ informed their "tolerated" participation in the civil activities of the Roman Empire. To some extent, they were a-temporal, which became moderated when the imminent end of the world never materialised. Theirs was a case of reluctant acceptance of the social order of their milieu.

A typical Christian at the time as once opined by Ernst Troeltsch, submitted with circumspection to the earthly affairs of the Roman society, even though he still opposed them in his heart. The primitive church was powerless to alter the social fabrics of the world around it since the circumstances of necessity left it with no alternative.[4] On the question whether the ecclesial community should or should not have rapprochement towards the Roman empire, two noticeable different traditions or schools of opinion emerged quite early as the hope in the future kingdom of God receded. A rethinking about the delayed coming of the kingdom took place. It came to be understood in the eschatological sense—deferred to the "end" of history.[5] In terms of opposing traditions, apocalyptic and Origenian (later known as Origen-Eusebian tradition) emerged.

The apocalyptic tradition was represented by the likes of Tertullian (150–220) and Hyppolytus of Rome (170–235) who did not approve of any form of marriage between the church and the Roman Empire. For them, the "undiluted" experience of the primitive church remained the ideal, absolute and normative. The mere thought that Caesar would one day become a Christian was to say the least, "a contradiction in terms."[6] In the mindset of Tertullian, all that the church wanted from the empire was the free space to "affirm its

2 Cf. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan L. O'Donovan (eds), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100–1625* (Michigan, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 415.
3 David Rogers, *Politics, Prayer and Parliament* (London, New York: Continuum, 2000), 1.
4 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church, vol. 1* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), 100–101; J. M. Hornus, *It is not Lawful for me to Fight* (Scottsdale: Philip Press, 1980).
5 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churc*h, 113, 115.
6 Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classical and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1986), 6.

obedience to God" and to God alone. For Hyppolytus, especially in his *Commentary on Daniel*, the empire was "the beast that dominates our times" and as such, there was no room for rapport or reconciliation between the church and the empire.[7]

On the flip side of the coin was the Origen-Eusebian tradition where most of the early church fathers can be said to belong. They included in the East, people like Diodore, Theodoret, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria. In the West, it counted among its ranks the likes of Ambrose of Milan, Jerome, Rufinus and Orosius.[8] The earlier St Augustine also belonged to this group. Since the point of departure for this group was philosophy, they were more accommodating and positive in their evaluation of the Roman Empire. Many in this tradition were providentially-oriented in their thoughts about the empire. Either trained in or indirectly influenced by the Origenian school of thought, they were convinced that the *Pax Romana* in the Mediterranean world was providential for the church and for the spreading of the gospel of Christ. Origen (184–253) himself believed that the birth of Christ during the reign of Augustus Caesar was providentially propitious.[9]

Similar divergent opinions are also discernible in the question of martyrdom. The difference was on the basis of philosophical background: Stoicism and Platonism, especially its neo-platonic variant. While the stoic view within the Christian community seemed to praise and even encourage the firmness in facing martyrdom, the neo-platonic view was rather cautious and critical. It demanded prudence and caution on the part of Christians in their confrontation with officials of the empire. Tertullian tended to follow Lucius Seneca in his exaltation of suicide, although for Tertullian the desire and motivation for such "suicide" were in testimony to the gospel of Christ. Tatian the Syrian (120–180) also believed that the constancy of the martyrs in their suffering was manifested in their uncompromising refusal to accept Caesar as Lord.[10]

There were many on the neo-platonic side of the divide who considered the stoic exaltation of martyrdom as "voluntary suicide." For instance, Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* (Stromateis) disapproved of voluntary provocation of martyrdom on the part of Christians. Origen, Cyprian of Carthage and Lactancius agreed with Clement of Alexandria. As far as they were concerned, true martyrs were those who died in the course of persecution on the basis of their Christian faith and not those who fomented trouble or incited violence in order to attract the attention and wrath of the state.[11] From the fourth century, this view held sway in the church, together with its proposition about the church's greater openness and disposition towards the Roman Empire.

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7 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage*, 23.
8 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage*, 22.
9 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage*, 22.
10 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage*, 23.
11 Franco Cardini, *Cristiani: Perseguitati e Persecutori* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2011), 61–62; Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage,* 23.

Hegemony of Origen-Eusebian Tradition

The position of the pre-Constantinian church towards the Roman state was fairly simple and settled. As far as the early Christians were concerned, the primary duty to the state was to be "good citizens" as they thought fit. All that changed with "the Triumph of the Cross" when Caesar ceased to claim to be God Himself but metamorphosed to become "God's representative on earth."[12] As the church became increasingly more organised and institutionalised, there issued forth the practical question of adjusting its theology to make room for a "Christian Caesar." Over time, it became a problem about managing two ideological extremes: conciliation or hostility to the state.

For Origen, the Roman Empire (although imperfect) was all the same a divine instrument to achieve God's providential designs. Eusebius of Caesarea, who followed closely in the footstep of Origen, portrayed Constantine as an "*Isapostolos*, a new Moses, a David"—an agent of divine providence. To achieve his desired goal on the principle of accommodation for the positive change of fortune for the church of his time, Eusebius, according to Norman Baynes, resorted to the Hellenistic model of *mimeis*.[13] Through this literary device, the king came to be recognised as an imitation of the king in heaven, like the Platonic theory of forms whereby what is on earth was seen as a copy or reflection of the extra-terrestrial perfect form. When applied to Constantine, the first Christian emperor became "the favoured one whom God receives"; "a transcript of divine sovereignty"; "an imitation of God himself"; a representative of the divine Logos who "reigns from ages which had no beginning." Constantine was considered the "friend" of God, and "an interpreter of the Word of God," who frames "his earthly government according to the pattern of that divine original, feeling strength in its conformity to the Monarchy of God."[14]

By means of a panegyric, pronounced on the thirtieth anniversary of the reign of Constantine on July 25, 335, Eusebius showed himself to be in tune with his time. As far as he perceived it, Constantine was the emperor par excellence who "made manifest the august title of the monarchical authority in the admirable fabric of his garments, since he alone deserves to wear the royal purple that only belongs to him alone."[15] Both his *Life of Constantine* and *Church History* would maintain this tune and line of thought. Eusebius was not alone in the praise of Constantine, as Lactantius's *De Mortibus Pesecutorum* clearly demonstrates. The fourth and fifth centuries can justly be described as the foundational epochs which cemented the official position of the church on its relation to the state. Notwithstanding their disapproval of the preponderances of the imperial power when it was not convenient, many church fathers subscribed to the Origen-Eusebian theory of a Christian emperor empowered by God to adjudicate in both temporal and spiritual affairs. For instance, Donatus, whose name came to be identified with the Donatist controversy, once posed this rhetorical question: "What had the emperor to do with the church?" In order to gain an upper hand over one's

12 Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 55.
13 Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar*, 7.
14 Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar,* 7.
15 Arnaldo Marcone, *Pagano e cristiano: Vita e mito di Costantino* (Roma, Bari: Editori Laterza, 2002), 177.

rival in such moments of polemics, bishop Optatus answered that the church was within the state, and not the state within the church. For Optatus, no one was above the emperor "except God alone who made him emperor."[16] It was more or less a politics of convenience.

It is true that more resistances to the emperor ensued from the West as the fourth century waned. Again, those resistances must be properly qualified. Most of the fierce oppositions to the emperor came as a result of controversies and polemics. An earlier Athanasius of Alexandria would never imagine himself going against the commands of the emperor. When the going was good, he dared to write in his *Defence to Constantius*: "I did not resist the commands of your Piety, God forbid; I am not a man that would resist even the Quaestor of the city, much less so great a Prince."[17] The later change of tone in Athanasius owes its origin to the change of events and circumstances, especially when he was out of imperial favour. Similar things can be said about the Ambrosian principle set out in his *Sermo contra Auxentium*: "even the most Christian Emperor is in the church but not over the church."[18] Ambrose had a protracted fight with the Arians in Milan. It was during such controversies that he further clarified his thought on church and state relation: "We render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Tribute due to Caesar, we deny it not. But Caesar cannot have no right over God's temple."[19]

The famous letter of Hosius of Cordova to Constantius, in which he sought to demarcate the spheres of imperial operations, must also be properly qualified because it was a product of polemics. His observation that Constans did not use force on religious matters is not altogether correct because the emperor applied coercion in his efforts to suppress the Donatists. He wrote:

> Do not use force, write no letters, send no Counts … When was any such thing done by Constans? What bishop suffered banishment? When did he appear as arbiter of an ecclesiastical trial? … Intrude not yourself into ecclesiastical matters, neither give commands unto us concerning them; but learn from us. God has put into your hands the kingdom, to us He has entrusted the affairs of His Church … It is written, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Neither therefore is it permitted unto us to exercise an earthly rule, nor have you, Sire, any authority to burn incense.[20]

Collectively, it can be said the church fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries did not favour a complete severance of church and state of their time. John Chrysostom in the Origen-Eusebian tradition considered imperial power as a divine instrument for the maintenance of the Christian faith.[21] As much as possible, all they wanted was an active partnership in which the functions of church and empire were clearly distinguished and respected. It is the principle of double spheres of power on which both East and West were firmly in accord.

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16 S. L. Greenslade, *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1954), 31.
17 Greenslade, *Church and State*, 47.
18 Heinrich A. Rommen, *The State in Catholic Thought* (St. Louis, London: B. Herder Book Company, 1945), 518.
19 Greenslade, *Church and State*, 54–55.
20 Greenslade, *Church and State*, 45.
21 Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (eds), *Religion and Political Thought* (London, New York: Continuum, 2006), 22.

Their disagreement bothered on its practical applications. Much later on, owing to historical changes and conditions, people like Athanasius, John Chrysostom, and Basil of Caesarea waged wars against imperial encroachments and interferences into ecclesiastical affairs which they found intolerable. Through concessions and obvious failures in particular occasions and places, the church of the fourth century induced the state to respect its space. That century was not only crucial in the definition and codification of the Christian faith, it was equally important in fashioning out a model of conflation that should exist between church and state. As it were, it became the rudder for subsequent generations of churchmen as the Roman Empire slowly but progressively disintegrated into irreconcilable West and Byzantium.

Plenitude of Power and Contention

As imperial authority gradually collapsed in the West, churchmen particularly in the East followed Origen-Eusebian tradition. They believed that the former Roman Empire had been purified and sanctified by Christianity, and therefore, by divine designs, it had become a Holy Empire. With the evolution of Byzantine theocracy and the aspiration of supremacy of its emperors over the entire *orbis Romanus*, the further the West felt alienated and sought to pave its own way. For its theoretical compass, the West found solace in the thoughts of St Augustine and Pope Gelasius I (492–496). Augustine, in his *City of God*, contrasted the decadent earthly kingdom with the kingdom of God which in his ingenuity, he never identified with the church. Unlike the churchmen in the East, Augustine never accepted the theology of history that saw the emperor as God's emissary on earth. He was convinced that "the ruler's command, even when just, did not represent the will of God for his subjects."[22]

St Augustine, as a product of classical education, believed that "all human beings desire happiness, and happiness is a state of being at peace." The right ordering of the temporal society is to orient the soul "towards the supreme Good, 'the Creator good' and not 'created good'."[23] Although medieval political theorists would constantly draw from the thoughts of St Augustine to justify their varying positions on the distinction between temporal and spiritual orders, the two cities, in the mind of Augustine, had "no material existence" but only "formal existence."[24] According to Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, "The two cities will only have material existence on the Day of Judgment … They do not constitute two different kinds of political society, but two kinds of moral society."[25] The Augustinian approach to politics for the right ordering of temporal affairs was theological and psychological[26] which saw human beings as "pilgrims, sojourning in the political space."[27]

Augustine also distinguished between "divine ordinances" and "divine commands." While the former is revealed in natural or physical forms, the latter is directed towards human

22 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage,* 29.
23 Hoelzl and Ward, *Religion and Political Thought*, 27.
24 Hoelzl and Ward*, Religion and Political Thought,* 27.
25 Hoelzl and Ward, *Religion and Political Thought*, 27.
26 Hoelzl and Ward, *Religion and Political Thought*, 27.
27 Bryan S. Turner, *The Religious and the Political: A Comparative Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 78.

conduct and institutions. With regard to divine commands under which he placed politics,[28] Augustine showed a great deal of pessimism. In comparison to St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), on the question of secular authority, he made concessions for a limited and negative role for temporal power.[29] In contradistinction, Thomas Aquinas in *De Regno* assigned a more positive role to secular power, and this role he identified as the preservation of the "common good" in the Aristotelian tradition. Augustinianism became progressively dislodged by Aristotelian cosmology as the medieval epoch developed. It then saw "human social order as a reflection of the physical structure of the universe," so that order in society was "understood on the model of order in the cosmos."[30]

On a different plain, Pope Gelasius developed his theory of two distinctive powers in opposition to the presumptuous Byzantine imperial claims of Emperor Zeno (474–491) in doctrinal questions. Pope Gelasius could rightly be described as a forerunner in the proposition on the separation of powers. In his disapproval of Zeno's "union formula" (*Henotikon*) of 482 over the question of "one person in two natures" or "one person out of two natures," Gelasius "defined the relation of ecclesiastical and secular authority in a form which would prove decisive within the Western church for subsequent centuries."[31] His contention was against a pretentious Caesaropapism which tended to arrogate divine right to the emperor over the church so that he became its autocrat in both spiritual and secular domains of the one Christian Empire which included the "imperial Church." The keyword in the ideology of Gelasius is "balance" of power so that no one person should exercise two distinct powers: "the sacred and the political *must* be separated, for Christ, combining in himself the roles of priest and king, has made it impossible for anyone else to combine them."[32] Pope Gelasius couched his thoughts in religious terms: "Mindful of human weakness, as befits his care for his own, he has made a distinction between the two roles, assigning each its sphere of operation and its due respect. Christian emperors were to depend on priests for their eternal life, priests were to profit from imperial government for their historical existence."[33]

In the Gelasian frame of mind, this was the order of things according to divine ordinance, for only Christ was both "Rex" and "Sacerdos," and therefore, he alone possessed "potestas regalis" and "auctoritas sacrata pontificium" since both powers were marvellously united in him.[34] Pope Gelasius would have been horrified to see how his theory of two distinct powers was misconstrued to support the idea of papal all-encompassing power based on two swords. From Christmas day of 800 when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne "Imperator Romanorum," the popes, as it were, began to live with the temptation of trying to become emperors themselves.[35] It reached its peak with Pope Innocent III (1161–1216), the first pope

28 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage,* 26–7.
29 Hoelzl and Ward, *Religion and Political Thought*, 39–40.
30 Shaifer and Porters, *Patristic Heritage*, 27.
31 O'Donovan, O., and O'Donovan, J. L., *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 177.
32 O'Donovan, O., and O'Donovan, J. L., *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 178.
33 O'Donovan, O., and O'Donovan, J. L., *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 178–9.
34 Bennett D. Hill, *Church and State in the Middle Ages* (New York, London: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), 58.
35 Rommen, *The State in Catholic Thought*, 516.

to use the title "Vicar of Christ." He declared himself to be "below God but above man, the judge of all men and judged by none."[36]

Until the position of the pope "as vicar of Christ" was fully developed, there was no possibility for him to combine "potestas regalis" and "auctoritas sacrata"; whereby he could confer imperial power or withdraw it.[37] As pride goes before a fall, medieval papal absolute power began to nose-dive from its height with Pope Boniface VIII, who was so daring as to say of himself in 1303: "I am Caesar; I am Emperor."[38] Papal claim of supremacy in temporal affairs did not go unchallenged. Marsilius of Padua (1275–1342) in his book, *Defensor Pacis,* refuted papal claim to plenitude of powers in matters of church and state. William of Ockham (1280–1349) advocated for a separation between church and state. He denied the superiority of the pope in temporal matters because in such issues, both the church and the pope were under the authority of the state.[39]

If Byzantium and the Orthodox Church can be charged with Caeasaropapism, the church in the West, especially during the medieval period, may be said to have been guilty of "papal-Caesarism." It refers to the political aspiration of the popes to absorb and domesticate temporal power within the papal ambient. Its roots dated back to the eighth century when the doctrine of the "power of the keys"—the power to "bind" and "loose" came to be propounded. It became enlarged to include external government in the juridical sense as plenitude of power (*plenitudo potestatis*). The papal claim to temporal and spiritual power rested upon a combination of metaphysical, cosmological, political and theological ideas. The earliest architects of plenitude of power were Honorius of Augustodunensis, Hugh of Victor and St Bernard of Clairvaux. In terms of the "Two Swords," St Bernard affirmed that the two swords—spiritual and temporal—belonged to the church. Once the operational idea was theologically supplied, the canonists then upheld the view that the pope was superior to the emperor since the latter received his confirmation, consecration and coronation from the pope.[40]

By the same measure, the Triple Crown (*Triregnum*) worn by the popes from the eighth century until 1963, when Pope Paul VI wore it at his installation, was used as a handy instrument in support of papal plenitude of power. The Triple Crown symbolised papal spiritual supremacy, his temporal power and his sovereignty over emperors and kings.[41] It is not surprising that even after the loss of the Papal States and the definitive surrender of Rome in 1870 to the modern state of Italy, Pope Leo XIII (1878–1903) made the "recovery" of papal temporal powers the mainstay of his international politics. The separation of church and state was a bitter pill for the Holy See to swallow for the greater part of the nineteenth century. Félicité de Lamennais and Charles de Montalembert, who championed social

36 J. M. Kik, *Church and State: The Story of Two Kingdoms* (London, New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 65.
37 Hill, *Church and State in the Middle Ages,* 58.
38 Kik, *Church and State*, 66.
39 Kik, *Church and State*, 69.
40 Hoelzl and Ward, *Religion and Political Thought*, 233–4.
41 Kik, *Church and State*, 5.

Catholicism and called for a separation between the altar and throne, were harshly dealt with by the Vatican for their audacity. Antonio Rosmini (1795–1855) met a similar fate when two of his works, *The Constitution according to Social Justice* and *The Five Wounds of the Church*, were condemned by the Congregation of the Index. It was an era dominated by the *Syllabus of Errors* and *Quanta Cura* (1864) of Pope Pius IX. The tempo was sustained by *Lamentabili sane* and *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) of Pope Pius X (1903–1914) alongside other similar aggressive policies which helped to heighten a Fortress Catholicism with its hyper reactionary bent until the second half of the twentieth century.

Orthodoxy and the "Symphony" of two Powers

As the Western church became increasingly wary and estranged from the emperors, the Eastern church became more wedded to the same emperors. As it were, the Christian faith in its Orthodox blend, together with Roman political concepts and the Hellenistic culture, became three important elements that defined Byzantium. All three shaped its identity as a new historical reality different from the former *pars orientalis* of the Roman Empire. The integration of all three and their synthetic incorporation into the fabrics of the dying Roman imperial framework gave birth to the Byzantine Empire.[42] Equally important in the evolution of the empire were two institutions: the Imperial Authority and the Patriarchate. These two establishments stood at the very centre of the new Oecumene, which defined itself as Christian and a Holy Empire.

Nowhere were the two institutions accorded better prominence and clarity than in the sixth Novella of Justinian I (482–565) and the formula of appointment to the Patriarchate of Constantinople as stipulated in 970 by Emperor John I Tzimisces or Tzimiskes (925–976). For Justinian: "the *Sacerdotium* and the *Imperium* are the greatest gifts that man has received from God … The *Sacerdotium* is concerned with divine matters, the *Imperium* presides over mortals … But both proceed from the same Principle."[43] In the formula for appointing the Patriarch of Constantinople, John Tzimisces underscored the interdependence of both powers:

> I know here on earth two powers: the power of the priesthood and the power of the kingship, the one entrusted by the Creator with the cure of souls, the other with the government of bodies, so that neither part be lame or halt but both be preserved sound and whole. As there is a vacancy on the Patriarchal throne I am placing there a man whom I know to be suitable.[44]

The intimate relation between the church and the Byzantine Empire over time became well cemented through custom and tradition. Patriarch Antony IV of Constantinople (1389–1390, 1391–1397) in the fourteenth century once acknowledged the services rendered to the Orthodox Church by the imperial throne which in return elicited the reverential attachment of the church to the Byzantine Emperors:

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42 George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980e), 27.
43 Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 59.
44 Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 61.

> The holy Emperor has a great position in the Church … and this is because the emperors from the outset established and confirmed the true faith in all the Oecumene. They convoked the Oecumenical Councils; they confirmed the pronouncements of the divine and sacred canons concerning true doctrine and the government of Christians … It is impossible for Christians to have the Church but not to have the Emperor. For Empire and Church are in close union and it is impossible to divide them from each other.[45]

There existed in theory a harmony between two the institutions when equilibrium was maintained in terms of exercise of power and authority. In practice, that was not always the case. The story of co-existence between Byzantine secular powers and spiritual authorities, like those of their counterparts in the West, was often marred by tensions and disputes. As far as the emperors were concerned, the Byzantine Oecumene in its entirety was entrusted to them by God. They saw it as their sacred duty to ensure an empire that was peaceful and secured—even if it meant interfering with doctrinal matters because, those too, they were convinced, formed part of their imperial responsibility.[46] John Chrysostom tried to push back in his assertion: "the domain of royal power is one thing and the domain of priestly power another, and the latter prevails over the former."[47] The bishops who gathered at the Council in Trullo held under Justinian II in 692, toed a different line in their declaration: "We are the servants of the emperor."[48]

This ambiguity in the conflation between the two Byzantine institutions is explicable by the terms "symphony" or "synergy." It was intended to act like a sort of check and balance system or agreement between the imperial and religious authorities. According to Meyendorff, the symphony or synergy of the two powers was never codified in juridical terms and neither was it understood by the Byzantines as a system of government or theologically as a dogma. It was rather a state of mind which at times "allowed certain emperors to act arbitrarily but did not formally subject the church to the state."[49] Being more of a pragmatic systemisation than a dogmatic stipulation, the "symphony" of relation was also never fully defined. Within the purview of the system, each of the two institutions was to keep its distance and respect the "sacred" space of their independent domains.[50]

The delicate balance of power between the two centres of power in the Byzantine universe came very close to being juridically formalised in the *Epanagoge* of Patriarch Photius during the reign of Emperor Basil I. It was never implemented and its carefully written preface was also never published. The *Epanagoge* reveals the combined efforts of both institutions to

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45 Alexander Schmemann, *Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 310; Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 57.

46 For example, on the role of Justinian as emperor and priest, cf., John W. Barker, *Justinian and the Later Roman Empire* (Madison, Milwaukee, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 94ff. Also, Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012). For Byzantine strong women, their politics and religious interferences, cf., Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010). Of particular interest are Theodora (527–548), wife of Justinian, and Irene (769–802).

47 Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 59.

48 Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 60.

49 J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 22.

50 Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 62.

smoothen their relation so as to minimise frictions. Using the analogy of the human body, the intended law-code defined the empire thus: "the State like man, is formed of members, and the most important are the Emperor and the Patriarch. The peace and happiness of the Empire depend on their accord."[51] As one of the "essential attributes" of the church, the emperor was considered the "architect" of the "Kingdom of God on earth."[52] The Orthodox Oecumene in the mindset of those who governed it, was meant to be a Christian Empire "in which the political and the religious powers would be regarded only as two complementary aspects of the same organised society."[53] Their complementarity on the basis of "symphony" or "synergy" implied "mutual harmony and independence of the two parts."

This "ideal harmonious" balance of power between two strong Byzantine institutions became, as it were, the heritage of the Russian Empire when it became Christian and opted for the Orthodox faith. As in the defunct Byzantine Empire, the Russian Tsar and the Orthodox Patriarch hold the key to understanding Russian history. Until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, both stood at the centre of the Russian universe. While the Patriarch of Russia was the offshoot of the tsar, the former conferred on the latter its sacred identity as the *basileus* in imitation of the Byzantine emperors. The coronation of the first tsar took place in 1547 with the anointing and installation of Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible). Forty-two years later, the Russian Orthodox Church got its first Patriarch in 1589 when Iov (the Bishop of Moscow) was enthroned in the Cathedral of the Kremlin. As for the tsar, he was believed to be different from other sovereigns of his time since by means of his consecration, he was seen as the "vicar" of Christ. His status as the "vicar of Christ" was rooted in the peculiarity of the liturgical rites used for his coronation. Unlike other kings in the West, whose coronation rites provided for a single anointing with the oil of chrism, those of the Russian tsar provided for double anointing: repetition of the sacrament of confirmation and anointing with the oil of chrism.[54]

The marriage between the tsar and the Russian Orthodox Church equally produced its own history of tensions, which often betrayed a lack of equilibrium envisaged by the principle of "synergy" or "symphony." There were times when the tsar dominated the church. A lot depended on the personalities of those who occupied the thrones of both institutions. For instance, Daniel, Metropolitan of Moscow, approved the illegitimate divorce of the Grand Prince of Moscow from his barren wife, Solomonia even at the opposition of Maxim the Greek and other Eastern bishops. The same metropolitan officiated at the marriage of the Grand Prince to Elena Glinski who gave birth to Ivan the Terrible.[55] The opposite of Daniel was Metropolitan Philip of Moscow who paid with his life for standing up to Ivan the Terrible: "I am a stranger upon the earth and am ready to suffer for the truth. Where is my faith if I am silent?" Sadly, after the bloody death of Metropolitan Philip in the hands of Ivan

51 Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 60.
52 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 157.
53 J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, 24; *https://www.britannica.com/topic/Epanagoge* (accessed May 17, 2018).
54 Adriano Roccucci, *Stalin e il Patriarca: Chiesa ortodossa e potere sovietico 1917–1958* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2011), vii–xxvii.
55 Schmemann, *Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, 314.

the Terrible, the Russian Church became silent so that Prince Kurbsky, who was forced to flee Moscow, wondered aloud: "Where are the faces of the prophets, who could accuse kings of injustice? Where is Ambrose, who restrained Theodosius? Where is John Chrysostom, who exposed the avaricious Empress?"[56]

In fairness, the Russian Orthodox Church in its deference to the state and a strong supporter of Russian nationalism, was not always subservient to the tsar. It merely tolerated its complete domination by Peter the Great and his successors. It showed its resilience and independence when it convoked the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church which met from 28 August to 20 September 1917. The synod gave back to the church its beloved Patriarchate, previously abolished by Peter the Great. According to Adriano Roccucci, "the Tsar disappears, the Patriarch returns,"[57] because with the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II (1868–1918) in 1917, Metropolitan Tikhon (1865–1925) of St Petersburg was elected Patriarch of Moscow and of all Russian Orthodox Churches. He was an archenemy of the Soviet state and anathematised its leaders whom he described as "outcasts of the human race."[58] His successor, Metropolitan Sergei of Moscow, although somewhat more conciliatory, proved himself a defender of the Russian Orthodox Church and its peasant members when Stalin through "The Great Terror" sought to suppress any voice of dissent.[59] In his 1927 public proclamation, Metropolitan Sergei clarified the position of Russian Orthodox Christians as citizens and as Christians:

> We wish to be Orthodox and at the same time to claim the Soviet Union as our civil motherland, the joys and successes of which are our joys and successes, the misfortunes of which are our misfortunes … Remaining Orthodox, we remember our duty to be citizens of the Union, "not from fear, but from conscience," as the Apostle has taught us (Romans 13:5).[60]

Conclusion

It is often wrongly assumed that Christianity, unlike Islam, should be a-political and by that implying disinterestedness. The a-political nature of Christianity does not mean indifference to society and civil affairs. The initial distance of the primitive church towards the Roman Empire of the time can be explained by many factors—chief among them was their literal expectation of the imminent return of Christ. Also important was the fact of Christianity's uncompromising rejection of every tincture of idolatry, which the Roman State at certain times and under certain emperors tended to enshrine within the body polity. Like the people of their time, they wanted peace and security which the state could guarantee.

The preparedness of Christianity to embrace the state disposed it to embrace the Roman Empire when it was convinced that the time was right, even though there was a divergence of

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56 Schmemann, *Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, 314–15.

57 Roccucci, *Stalin e il Patriarca*, 3.

58 Ronald G. Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 189.

59 For details of that period of darkness in contemporary Russian history, cf., Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 2008).

60 Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 189.

opinions in this regard. Political theorists tend to agree on one basic fact, which is, people everywhere desire peace and serenity because they are the necessary requisites for any human development. Whether based on the functionalist theory or the social contract theory, a civil government exists to guarantee the peace and security of all those who live within its political space. In contemporary terms, a state is described as a failed state when it cannot perform such a function.

This essay aimed at depicting the tensions and conflicts that often characterised the relation between church and state. On Good Friday of each year, the Catholic Church prays for those in public offices and who govern with authority so "that throughout the world, the prosperity of peoples, the assurance of peace, and freedom of religion may … be made secure." The debate on the means and how to achieve that peace and security was a constant preoccupation for the people of yesterday, as it is still today. For this very reason, the domains of the church and state, of necessity, must overlap, and at certain times, miscomprehension, tension and confliction are practically impossible and unavoidable.

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