

# Throne and Altar

by Hugh Barbour, O.Praem.

*“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”*

—1 Corinthians 10:31

My father, God rest his soul, was very fond of Thai food, with its quickly sautéed noodles and peppery élan. Not far from his condominium in the Rossmore section of Los Angeles, there was a practically endless selection of Thai places. One, I remember, was frequented by monks whose vermilion robes seemed like an authoritative advertisement for the peppers on our plates. In every one of these establishments (and we tried quite a few until Dad settled on his favorite), there was a little Buddhist shrine with some offerings before it along with a framed portrait of the king of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej, Rama IX, the world's longest-reigning head of state, and the only one with a Swiss *baccalauréat* in Latin and Greek. Dad would inevitably exclaim, “Ah, the union of throne and altar!” (Sometimes, he would also ask, “Where’s the picture of Anna?”—but this nursery humor does not speak to our point here.)

Never had I thought of this expression, the kind Anglican vicars like to pronounce, as anything more than figurative until this year, when I stood before the legendary throne of Charlemagne in the imperial basilica of Aachen. I had seen a picture of the throne before, but only from the front. Viewed from the side, one discovers that the throne is also an altar. It was considered a relic, our guide explained, with its back slab, which forms the altarpiece, taken from the Anastasis in Jerusalem. Recent scholarship (German, of course), in spite of the clerical skepticism expressed by my guide, has determined that the throne-altar is really from the time of Charlemagne and not a century later, as was thought. According to Einhard, the emperor's official biographer, the Abbasid caliph Harun al Rashid gave the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to Charlemagne—no doubt to offer a keen slight to the Eastern emperors—as a personal property and enriched his legates with many gifts for their return to Aachen. Thus, the tradition of the reliquary altar-throne enjoys a genuine verisimilitude. Practically every legitimate and illegitimate claimant to European imperium has had to sit on this throne for at least the space of a paternoster or, in the 20th century, has gone to gawk at it. Thus Hitler even, and, in 1979, Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, the former of whom declared of the venue chosen for the discussion of European monetary policy at which *la douce France* was given quite a beating by the Bundesrepublik: “Perhaps when we discussed monetary problems, the spirit of Charlemagne brooded over us.” *Brooded* might just have been the right word, since it would seem that, in contemporary E.U. policy, the dearly purchased potters' field has replaced the freely given tomb of the Savior.

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A priest, of course, should have a lively interest in the placement of the altar he serves. Einhard and, before him, Eusebius and, before him, the author of the *Res Gestae* of Augustus (which Mussolini had meaningfully caused to be inscribed by the newly reconstructed *ara pacis*, the “altar of peace” in Rome) all recount the essential role of the civil sovereigns of their day in promoting and ordering the practice of religion. Christianity, unlike the other Roman religions before it, can surely exist without legitimization by the state, but whether it ever has for long, or whether it ought to, or whether the state can exist without religion are important questions—questions whose resolution is bound to be given in practice, even if it is avoided in theory.

What would Western Latin Christianity be without Charlemagne, or Slavic Christendom without Vladimir or the Nemanjas, or Lutheranism without Philip of Hesse, or Calvinism and Low Church Anglicanism without the house of Orange, or any of these without the original initiative of Constantine? Indeed, where would the supposedly apolitical and nonmagisterial Baptists be without American foreign policy and their chaplaincy to the presidents? And what, oh what would be the moral authority of the Holy See and its recently itinerant occupants, were its once explicit and now mostly implicit claim to temporal power not recognized by the greater number of governments? As for Judaism and Islamic states, they are inherently linked to earthly rule, but then, the one is the precursor and the other, the abusive distortion, of Christian polity.

What is the nature of the relation between religion and the state? To cut to the heart of the matter, we must step outside the context of the customary presentation of the problem of Church and state relations—namely, that of the Enlightenment—and, indeed, even outside the broader context that preceded it, that of the medieval confrontation between the papacy and the restored Western Roman Empire.

First of all, and apart from all theories and evaluations, the mutual influence of Church and state is a fact. Whether the state is directing the extent and quality of religious life among its people, or the Church is determining the limits of the legitimacy of the state, their reciprocal relationship is a reality. In the second place, and apart from all supernatural sublimations which, by God's initiative, may further elevate and perfect the merely human, the roots of this reality are to be traced most deeply in the principles which govern human nature—that is, in the natural law ascertainable by reason.

Human nature is specific; it is one thing shared by many by way of a material multiplication, or procreation. This is a point easily obscured if the revolutionary perspective of the Enlightenment dominates the discussion. Men are not first

of all unique, autonomous persons endowed with rights (although they are, in some sense, also that); rather, they are eminently repeatable individuals of a species that descends from its forebears by generation. Human society takes its rise from the relationship of father and mother to children, and to their children, and to their children's children. What does this immediately imply? Simply that the existence, nourishment, and education of a human being depends on transcendent, albeit human, causes that span time and space, and extensively exceed the limits of an individual existence. Such causes, personal as they are, are inherently religious, since they establish a bond between persons which determines the direction of life and fulfills its deepest natural needs. To be a father or mother is to fulfill a role which is that of a source and governor of life, and this is the very foundation of all religious understanding about the divinity. This is the original mysterious analog of revealed religion for a Christian; and for many human religious systems, it is not even an analogy but the simple fact of descent from the first cause of one's kind: the gods. That parenthood is a certain kind of divinity is not a weird insight unique to the Mormons; it is a fact of human nature. It is for this reason that the original priesthood of natural religion was that of the fathers of households, and of the father *par excellence*, the chief or king.

Thus, "social conservatives" should stop objecting and painting distinctions when they are told that, by insisting on "family values," they are imposing their religion on their neighbors. Rather, they should respond that this is, in fact, what they intend to do, and cannot help doing, since a society that finds its origin and most fundamental cause in the parental household is, by that very fact, inherently religious. On this level, there is a necessary union between religion and the state.

It is only when religion includes principles of existence and conduct that transcend the context of human procreation that the distinction which, in some matters, implies separation needs to be made. This is the religion of the Christian Church, which claims for Her members a birth to a nature and a law that transcends the limits of the nature they have received from their parents after the flesh. This revelation of grace gives the Church a certain independence from the state that other religions, based on the simple laws of human descent and the national mythic lore all genealogies require, do not possess. Even so, this independence only regards this higher, supernatural life and the means to obtain it, and not at all the nature that underlies it. And so it is that the Apostle enjoins subjection to legitimate authority on all the faithful in Romans 13.

Far from being an age in which the nature of the relation between religion and civil society is obscure or problematic, our own is rather an age in which the relation is being revealed the most clearly. The matter does not concern the aspects of our revealed religion that are inherently supernatural, and about which Church-state relations have been often enough concerned in European history—in, for example, the investiture controversy or the suppression of cloisters—but, rather, the natural foundation of religion that is also the foundation of the state: the family. Marriage and procreation, its defining end, are the point at which religion and human society are in a certain sense identified. All the previous attacks on the Church have been against Her divine mission, against Her priesthood and altar; now, the principal targets are Her people in their

homes, at the family table and in the marriage bed.

The great Calvinist political theorist Johannes Althusius, so highly esteemed by the late lamented Christian friend of *Chronicles* readers Dr. Harold O.J. Brown, provides us, in the *Politica*, with a simple way to conceive of the relationship and communion of the ecclesiastical and secular in terms of the two tablets of the Decalogue:

Universal communion is both ecclesiastical and secular. Corresponding to the former are religion and piety, which pertain to the welfare and eternal life of the soul, the entire first table of the Decalogue. Corresponding to the latter is justice, which concerns the use of the body and of this life, and the rendering to each his due, the second table of the Decalogue. In the former, everything is to be referred immediately to the glory of God; in the latter, to the utility and the welfare of the people associated in one body. These are the two foundations of every good association. Whenever a turning away from them has begun, the happiness of a realm or universal association is diminished.

Of course, the second tablet begins with the positive, universal command to honor father and mother, just as the first tablet begins with the command to worship God alone. The secular order of the state, then, concerns itself primarily with the transcendent order of human origins and the direction of human life from those origins in terms of this earthly life, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee," and the ecclesiastical order of the Church deals primarily with that which is divine and transcends this life, "for in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

The standard whereby the relationship of religion and the state is to be judged is found, then, in the extent to which the state respects the family—that is, honors its own foundation, which is similarly the foundation of religion. Thus, in Christian lands as in others, the state does not depend simply on the Church for its legitimacy but recognizes that it has a similar origin, since the family is the principal *locus* of religion, revealed or natural. The Church, in Her turn, recognizes the state's interest in protecting such religious practices as do not harm the natural life of families in accordance with the natural law, even if She may not recognize these other religions as adequate for Her own higher, supernatural finality.

In this nobler religiosity, the state also has an interest and may, as the history of Christian states from the reign of Constantine on shows us, participate, since the revealed communion of grace compliments natural society and perfects it. With this thought in mind, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church recently made this careful and insightful observation in its encyclical *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* regarding the possibility of a shift from secularist forms of government to confessional ones:

Any change of government to one [that is] more religiously rooted, [if it is] introduced without a spiritualizing of society itself, will inevitably degenerate into falsehood and hypocrisy and make this form weak and valueless in the eyes of the people. However, one cannot altogether exclude the possibility of such a spiritual revival of society as to make reasonable a religiously higher

form of government.

It should be pointed out that not even the cautious periods of the declaration *Dignitatis humanae* of the Second Vatican Council ruled out the possibility of such a confessional state. Be that as it may, the simple truth remains that the foundation of human society in the family guarantees a certain necessary bond between religion and civil society, independent of whether the state recognizes a particular form of religion as its own. In our own tradition, this latter possibility was meant to be left to the prudence of the individual states. Now it seems that the states are only free to seek to overturn what little there is left of state recognition of religion, first with divorce, then with the prevention and interruption of life, and now with the solemnization of unnatural unions.

In the face of such enormities, more destructive of human happiness than any of the religious persecutions of the Old World, we can cry out with Chesterton at a hundred years' distance:

O God of earth and altar,  
Bow down and hear our cry,  
Our earthly rulers falter,  
Our people drift and die;  
The walls of gold entomb us,  
The swords of scorn divide,  
Take not thy thunder from us,  
But take away our pride.

From all that terror teaches,  
From lies of tongue and pen,

From all the easy speeches  
That comfort cruel men,  
From sale and profanation  
Of honor and the sword,  
From sleep and from damnation,  
Deliver us, good Lord!

Tie in a living tether  
The prince, the priest and thrall,  
Bind all our lives together,  
Smite us and save us all;  
In ire and exultation  
Aflame with faith, and free,  
Lift up a living nation,  
A single sword to thee.

Einhard's *Vita Karoli Magni* seamlessly and cheerfully recounts Charlemagne's family life, his study of Latin and Greek (like today's "barbarian" king of Siam), and his habits in food and drink, along with his support of religion and his conquests. My father the priest was also a Charles. Returning to where we began, I recently heard a radio interview with a student at the Culinary Institute of America (that other CIA, now housed suitably in a former Jesuit novitiate) who declared that to be a successful chef was to be "like a god" to one's diners. I do not suppose he was serving up pad thai, but let us say that, for my father and me, that would have been enough to have given him some claim on the title, or at least a "demi." Here is the foundation of the state and its oldest established religion: the nourishment of children and their education to be fathers themselves. ◀



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# Clueless in the Congress

## The Reauthorization of a Reckless Bill

by Beverly K. Eakman

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the No Child Left Behind Act are up for reauthorization again. This process typically entails legislators tweaking the bill—a caveat here, a zinger there. Almost always, it translates into more money.

Representatives George Miller (D-CA) and Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA) of the Committee on Education and Labor recently released a “discussion draft” of NCLB. They probably meant well, but it is clear, from the Title I portion alone, that the acts remain mired in nonacademic pursuits, far removed from proficiency in the basics. (Where is there a place for information relating to real learning capabilities—visual and auditory memory, visual identification, spatial and abstract reasoning, concentration, perceptual speed, hand-eye coordination, and thought-expression synchronization?) Pages 307-317 confirm that a primary goal of the legislation is to build a permanent profile of every student and teacher, and to make these accessible on a need-to-know basis to any entity that calls itself a research or civil-rights group. While there is a refreshing nod to parents (they get to view materials) and language concerning security from unauthorized parties (including a requirement to destroy files after a prescribed period), none of these stipulations carry viable penalties for noncompliance. In fact, most of them are not technologically feasible—i.e., there is no way to “prove” that a backup file has not been created or that a parent has been given complete, unaltered records.

Concern over dossier-building has risen since the September 11 terror attacks, when the term *data mining* hit the news. Most people had never heard of it. But schools have been doing it since the 1970's. Back then, it was called *psychographics*.

Psychographics, which targets specific population segments through market research, has its origins in advertising. The concept was picked up by political strategists to target socio-demographic groups so that each voting bloc heard what it wanted to hear about a candidate or issue. A primary weapon in their arsenal was the questionnaire (or survey)—in effect, a “test.” The information was gathered both blatantly and surreptitiously.

Webster's New World Communication and Media Dictionary defines *psychographics* as “the study of social class based upon the demographics . . . income, race, color, religion, and personality traits.” These characteristics, it states, “can be mea-

sured to predict behavior.” So advertisements are based on surveys seeking out people who have certain characteristics in common.

The marketing rationale behind collection of behavioral data is that the best predictor of what you might buy tomorrow is whatever you bought yesterday—your “purchase history.” Political experts realized that the same could be said for what a person believes. Psychologists with advanced degrees in statistics had a new job. Whether the product being “sold” was coffee, “same-sex marriage,” or a candidate for public office, the best predictor of what a person (or a voting bloc) would do in the future was whatever he (or it) did, believed, or supported in the past. Much of this is ascertainable from public records—publications subscribed to, religious and political affiliations, charities and causes contributed to, shopping habits, hobbies, stocks, occupations. Then the technology evolved. Computers proved excellent tools for cross-matching and linking information in such a way as to entice special interests—pharmaceutical companies, college admissions officials, insurance companies, and government agencies—who were willing to pay well for such insights.

By canvassing for opinions and preferences, technically known as values and lifestyles (VALS) data, and cross-matching these with public and private records, analysts found that they could establish areas of commonality across socioeconomic, demographic, political, and religious groups. If necessary, they could get down to the individual level.

By using VALS data, public-relations and advertising firms began to target marketing “packages” to specific groups, and even to individuals—through the mail, the news media, the internet. It then occurred to educators that they could do likewise.

The Miller-McKeon draft demonstrates a troubling lack of historical context. There seems to be no awareness that yesterday's psychographic surveys are today's school “assessments.” Experts have become so skilled at phrasing their questions, inserted into academic tests and class questionnaires alike, that the “target subjects” (pupils) have no idea just how much they are divulging. The result is a behavioral baseline, a profile—retained in databases for posterity.

Michigan's school code specifies that only those who have “earned doctorates in psychology . . . and related behavioral sciences” are qualified to “interpret” assessments. If assessments were not psychological profiles masquerading as tests, would such a requirement be necessary? Worse, the seemingly unrelated pieces of academic and personal data, which reveal political leanings, have been fed into “predictive” computer models. Today, these can serve to eliminate undesirables from any profession that might entail leadership or influence.

Herein lies the danger of out-of-control data collection, es-

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