

NATIONAL BUT NOT NATURAL

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UNSET. Dimming dusk. A small group of the villagers, men, hurry their bound burden over a rough, rutted road. At the extreme outskirts of their borough stands stolidly a solitary tree, sturdy with age, strong of trunk and limb. They arrive, surround their goal and silently, rapidly surrender their squirming, gagged victim to the noose. With quick, irregular jerks they raise him to his horrible doom.

Why? Because he had said: "there is no God?" No. Why then? Because he had taught their children to say and believe: "there is no God."

No State has legalized lynching. No Church, nor churchman condones lynching, no matter what its provocation. Yet an enraged, outraged mob has repeatedly resorted to this rigorism throughout the pages of history. Fortunately for both parties, lynched and lynchers, one occasion is usually sufficient to subdue the tempest of their wrath. However, not infrequently, precisely similar incidents have been but the beginnings of monstrous civil, national and even international, catastrophes. A single bullet destroying a single life in 1914 sped on through the body of its victim, ripped up the mightiest nations of the world and for four frightful years drenched Europe with blood. When statesmen substitute tyranny for statecraft, they may expect their constituents to substitute roaring anarchy for placid citizenship.

The particularly obnoxious incident related above is a case in point. Statesmen, so-called, of a vast nation, a nation cultured in the truer sense of the word, have betrayed the trust of an honest people, have sold statesmanship for the revolting but lucrative mess, tyranny. With studied, bald treachery they have converted their God-given power into man-made persecution of that same God and His guileless children. But children are not so guileless that they are incapable of being stirred to vengeful violence, however incompatible it may be with their Christian heritage. Mexico's statesmen, dissatisfied with merely

closing religious schools, by 'law' demand positive irreligion to be crushed into the consciences of her infants. Mexico's citizenry after years of patient, hopeful submission have begun to organize counter action. History repeats itself. If Mexican lawless legislation continues, the world may reasonably expect an otherwise law-abiding people to mass themselves into a law-seeking rebellion. Law and order shall eventually return to Mexico, but at the insane price of countless human lives, probably not a few human souls.

Before time began, law had known eternal existence in the mind of God, the Supreme Lawmaker. Adam in his first conscious moment knew in his heart the law of his Creator. His paradise complete in the person of his wife, our primogenitor freely carried on the diabolical rebellion of the first rebel, repeated Lucifer's "I will not serve." But Adam, and we with him, paid the price of our revolt. Immortality changed to mortality; the subordinated body rebelled against the soul; the lower appetites refused subjection to the higher faculties; the will became weak; the brilliant illumination of the intellect became discouragingly dark. With singular mercy, the Creator promised a term to our misery. Accordingly, until the fulness of time arrived, He visited His prophets and patriarchs with such masterful markers on the road to salvation as, for example, the Mosaic grant, the Decalogue. Yet in spite of the table imprinted on his heart, in spite of the Tables of Stone, man's each generation grew increasingly weaker, his "non serviam" grew increasingly more robust. At length Incomprehensible Mercy rewarded incorrigible mockery with irremissible Redemption. Christ, truly God and truly Man, was born. He lived with, taught, died at the hands of and thereby saved eternally His own subjects, His own creation, His own children. The law of the heart, the law of the Commandments He magnificently clarified and completed with the law of the Gospel. Christ as God is the Eternal Lawmaker; as God-Man He is the Omnipotent, Omniscient Lawyer pleading before the bar of His heavenly Father the cause of lawbreaking man.

Under the inspiration of the Master Lawyer Himself and at His own sweet call, Thomas Aquinas exposed once more the majestically simple, incomparably suitable law upon which all man-made laws must rest, if they are to be laws. Even the following superficial glance at the principles, the foundations upon which St. Thomas erects the structural beams of the frame-

work which is the Christian State, ought to dissipate the validity of contrary statecraft. Soviet Russia, ravished by atrocious autocrats, together with Mexican autocracy, stands stripped of their pseudo-principles when confronted by the penetrating shafts of Thomastic statescraft. So, too, is it with kindred nations, who with somewhat lesser effort essay to follow those abominable Frankensteins of contemporary statesmanship, Soviet Russia and Mexico.

For St. Thomas the ultimate bulwark which supports true political philosophy is Nature. Man by reason of his twofold nature has a twofold end or purpose to attain, the one, spiritual, the other, physical. Immeasurably superior, the spiritual or intellectual goal has been divinely pointed out to man through the instrumentality of certain beacon lights, which, aggregately, considered, constitute the natural moral law. The natural moral law is a rule which performs the function of directing man to a perfection which as yet he does not possess. This same natural perfection is consummated by unswerving obedience to the first precepts of the natural law: "do good; avoid evil."¹ Nature has determined man's end; she has likewise determined the essential means which he shall use to obtain that end.

From the fact that man is by nature a social animal, St. Thomas arrives at the conclusion that in order to attain his natural end, that social fabric which is the State is a genuine necessity to man.² By his very nature man is inclined to live in society. Solitary life, however elevated, is abnormal life. Many things necessary for his ultimate perfection would be lacking to man if he lived alone. It is the State which in the natural order of things best supplies man with these necessities, viz., corporal, moral and even spiritual needs, peace, protection of life and property, education; in a word, all things required for the full, the good human life.³ Functioning toward this end, the State fulfills its immediate obligation to man, and by reason of thereby acquiring for him and for his fellows "the common good," it fulfills its ultimate purpose. However, Aquinas does not overlook the fact that the "common" good of the State is to be duly subordinated to that of the individual when the "private" good is of a higher order.⁴ Russian socialistic com-

¹ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

² *De Reginime Principum*, I, 1.

³ *In Libros Politicorum*, prolog.

⁴ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 39, a. 2, ad 2.

munism and Mexican efforts towards totalitarianism have no place in a political theory which holds, as does that of Aquinas, that the good of the State is not the sole objective. The good of the State and the good of the individual are not necessarily opposed; and despite unfounded claims to the contrary, precedence should be given in many cases to the good of the individual.

In view of this present paper it might be well to pause briefly at the Thomistic doctrine on civil authority. Building on Christ's own words, "you should not have any power (against Me), unless it were given thee from above,"⁵ and again, on the inherent nature of man, St. Thomas holds that civil authority resides in the community and more especially in him who is duly delegated to rule that group.⁶ He points out also that it is by the exercise of this authority that the State is to pursue its end. Obviously, only admirers of such rulers as Stalin and Calles need be reminded that Aquinas here refers to the use of authority, not its abuse.

Civil authority is primarily operative through law, according to St. Thomas.⁷ Law, he states, is an authoritative, promulgated precept ordained to the common good.⁸ In the same exposition he holds that any precept dissonant with right reason, contrary to nature or not ordered with a view toward the common good is not a law; it is tyrannical despotism. The "honest" ruler, then, interprets the natural law, or at most supplements it, when pronouncing civil precept; never does he supplant the natural moral law. The "just" ruler exercises that perfection of his will which inclines him to desire the good of that society of which he and his subjects are the integral parts, and to effect in so far as he can that each member of his society receives his due.⁹ The "unjust" ruler attacks knowingly the rights of his subjects; he acts contrary to what a rational or a reasonable will should naturally desire. Thus his conduct is opposed to legal justice in so far as it disregards the common good which is ever the true objective of legal justice, and his conduct is opposed to particular justice in so far as it fails to seek and maintain what is right and just among individuals.¹⁰

⁵ John, xix, 11.

⁶ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 90, a. 3.

⁷ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 50, a. 1, ad 3.

⁸ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 90, a. 4.

⁹ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 58, a. 1.

¹⁰ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 59, a. 1.

"The subject, as a subject, exists for the state; as a man, the state exists for him."¹¹ He is a poor carpenter who is more concerned with his tools than with his tooling; so, too, he is a poor ruler who is more concerned with his rule than with his ruling. St. Thomas holds that "the ruler of the state exists for the state, not the state for the ruler."¹² This is fundamental in St. Thomas' teaching.

Summarily, St. Thomas' political philosophy is the philosophy of nature. As from first principles, he builds his legal thesis upon the ultimate divine and human foundations. The eternal law existing in the mind of God rules all things and it is that upon which all other law depends; all other laws are but particular manifestations, derivatives of the eternal law.¹³ For St. Thomas the natural law is partly that inborn light of man's reason by which he is able to direct himself and to act consciously so that his acts execute the eternal law; just as the natural actions of things, produced by virtue of their natural inclinations, execute the eternal law unconsciously.¹⁴ Aquinas holds that it is essentially of the very first principles of the natural law that man, the handiwork of the Creator and a social animal, should reverence God and act toward his fellows in such wise as the particular nature of his relations with them demands.¹⁵ Finally, the Angelic Doctor culminates his masterly political synthesis taken from nature itself in his tract on human law,—the ordinations of reason made for the common good of this or that society of human beings, enacted and promulgated by him in authority in each group.¹⁶

"Away with Faith. Give us Reason." Such are the undraped devices of communism. Directly, communists turn about and use rapine, not reason. "We want all things in common" is their daily shrill shriek. By night, inebriate with self-appointed power, they organize legislation most subversive of that same common good. They boast of "truth," but they butcher *Truth*. They legislate for "liberty," yet legalize license. They struggle to eradicate the supernatural; instead they suc-

¹¹ *De Reginime Principum*, III, 11.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 93, a. 1. 3.

¹⁴ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 1.

¹⁵ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

¹⁶ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 96, a. 1.

ceed in shackling the natural. They set up their own god, nature, and with the selfsame hand blow him to bits.

If the State really wants liberty, let it learn to love. Hate has never brought else than disaster. If the State really wants all things in common, let it join the Christian community which is the Church. If the State really wants the perfection of the natural, let it submit to the supremacy of the supernatural.

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