

# THE VATICAN'S POSITION IN EUROPE

*By Luigi Sturzo*

WHAT are the intentions and the goals of the Vatican in this tragic yet challenging moment when the end of the war in Europe is near and a new world is emerging from the ruins of the old? The question is being widely discussed. This paper is an attempt to describe the position of the Vatican in Europe in terms that are as close to reality as possible, and to suggest some of the problems which the Church faces. The author uses the facts and the Vatican documents which can be verified by all, and interprets them in the light of his own experience and his knowledge. The analysis is a personal contribution in no way authorized.

The problem which the question poses is complex. One cannot place in any single category the relationships between the Holy See and the various states of the world or the attitudes which can be taken by the hierarchy of each country. Nor can one thus simplify either the attitude of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as such or the positions which Catholics acting under their own responsibility think it right and necessary to take, individually or in groups. Within the Catholic Church there is a margin of freedom, large or small according to circumstances which, moving from purely religious forms to social and temporal activities, quite often permits the emergence of truly autonomous movements, especially in politics.

An example taken from actual recent events may illustrate this point to those who, being outside the discipline of the Church, believe or surmise that the Church is a kind of militant army in which only the will of the supreme head prevails. In his speech of September 1, 1944, Pope Pius XII reasserted two points of Catholic doctrine: that private property is in the sphere of natural law, and hence cannot be abolished; and that the social duties which flow from the very nature of property transcend the private good and must aim at the common good. This is the doctrine. In the process of applying it to the conditions of each country the bishops will perhaps issue certain guiding statements, the philosophers will discuss the ethical implications of the doctrine, the economists will examine the practical consequences of its application, the sociologists will inquire into its social effects, the jurists will frame possible legislation, and the statesmen,

finally, will undertake to reconcile the various issues which have thereby been raised with questions of public policy and party politics, and with the circumstances of the moment.

Plainly, such a process cannot be described in terms of soldiers carrying out the orders of their commander-in-chief, and still less in terms of the mechanical application of a fixed slogan. We are dealing with men who think and act, who bring to bear the fruit of their own minds and consciences. Even if they all agree on the desirability of carrying out the teachings of the Pope, they will differ about the means to be employed, the time that action should be taken, the limits of the program and so on. A vast amount of human effort and personal responsibility is mobilized to translate a doctrine into a concrete program and the "margin of freedom" increases in direct relationship to the distance which separates the statement of the general principle from its final execution.

## II

What will be the relationship between the Holy See and the states of Europe after the war? Let us proceed on the basis of certain hypotheses. Normally, the Vatican's policy follows the tradition that the Church should never take the initiative in changing the status of its relations with foreign countries. Thus, for the Vatican, the prewar concordats with Italy, Germany and Poland are still in existence as are the *modus vivendi* with Czechoslovakia and Spain, and the friendly ties with England, France, Belgium and Holland. There is a presumption that the world is moving along its old paths, even when it has been turned upside down by a war as universal and destructive as this one. The Holy See continues to maintain relations with all the states with which it enjoyed them before the war. It has even added three countries to that list: Japan, China and Finland. But the initiative for a change can be taken by the other parties. What changes seem likely?

For a long period of time Germany will be occupied by the four Powers, the United States, Great Britain, Russia and France. Presupposing a friendly attitude toward the Vatican on the part of Great Britain, the United States and France, it may be assumed that these occupying Powers will maintain relationships with the Holy See either through a single nuncio, at present residing in Berlin, or through several local representatives. Will Russia follow the policy of the other three Allies?

Major issues are bound to arise with regard to the U.S.S.R. If Moscow is willing to exchange diplomatic representatives with the Vatican, no matter what the differences and mutual hesitation, as China and Japan have recently done, the Vatican will not refuse or demand unacceptable conditions. Even if Moscow is unwilling to enter into diplomatic relationships, it would be in line with Vatican tradition to send a religious envoy, either official (as in the case of the United States since the time of Leo XIII) or unofficial (as in the case of the mission of the Dominican Father Delos to the Committee of National Liberation in Algiers). Since 1917 numerous envoys from the Vatican have in fact been sent to Russia to deal with humanitarian and religious problems, irrespective of their standing with Soviet authorities. In May 1922, for example, a Vatican mission headed by the then Under Secretary of State Monsignor Pizzardo was dispatched to the Soviet delegation at the Genoa conference, a gesture of the Holy See which received wide attention. Foreign Commissar Chicherin, the head of the Russian delegation, thanked the envoy for the Vatican's friendly move, but was reported as having let it be understood that any further step would be premature. After 22 years a new step might or might not be considered timely.

Many recently believed that the Communist leader Togliatti, a member of the present Italian Government, had presented a plan for closer relationships between the U.S.S.R. and the Holy See to the Christian Democratic leader de Gasperi, also a member of the Italian Government, and that either jointly or separately they had discussed the matter with the Papal Under Secretary of State, Monsignor Montini. But the existence of such a plan was later denied by the official Vatican organ *Osservatore Romano*. Since then the Moscow press has twice attacked the Vatican, accusing it of following a pro-Fascist policy in the past and of continuing such a policy. Although it might be possible to place several constructions upon these attacks, they unquestionably reflect the resentment of the Communists, and of the pro-Soviet elements in other countries, who are embittered against that part of the Catholic press which systematically attacks Moscow both for its Communism and for its policies toward Poland, Lithuania and Finland. The Moscow press quoted the Brooklyn *Tablet* and the London *Catholic Herald* in its criticism of the Vatican; neither paper claims to be a spokesman of the Holy See or of Catholic opinion in general, however.

The diplomatic history of the Holy See offers sufficient precedents to enable the Vatican to establish relations with Soviet Russia. The Vatican was represented at the court of the Sultan at Constantinople after leading Europe's fight against the Turk for many centuries. The Vatican was also represented at St. Petersburg when the Pope was a temporal sovereign and afterward, even though the Tsars maintained anti-Catholic laws in Poland and throughout Russia.

The Holy See's opposition to Bolshevist Russia is based on two factors: the materialistic theories which form the premise of Communism, and the atheistic propaganda sponsored by the Soviets. True enough, the world is full of materialistic theories of the most varied kind, taught in all sorts of universities: the Russian contribution to materialistic thought may be said to be quite small from the scientific point of view and not without uncertainty in its practical application. And atheistic propaganda, frankly or secretly striving for a wide de-Christianization of society, is not absent in any country. Nor is open backing of such a movement by public authorities peculiar to Russia. France went through a period when official teaching in all schools had an overwhelmingly positivistic tinge, founded on agnosticism or frank atheism. And Hitler has sponsored the pagan myths of Ludendorff and Rosenberg and forced the teaching of the theory of a super-race, aiming at the intellectual and moral de-Christianization of youth.

Russia also closed churches, convents and seminaries, prohibited teaching by the clergy — including the teaching of the catechism in church — and enacted a long series of measures designed to thwart any rebirth of religious sentiments in the new generation. It must, however, be admitted that these acts were the product of a revolutionary mood, akin to the mood of the French at the end of the eighteenth century, and that they are not necessarily a concomitant of the type of political and economic régime later created in Russia. Indeed, Stalin has changed many things. The program for a classless society and the elimination of all private property has been modified; and in the field of religion the Russian Orthodox Church has been recognized, with some restrictions, and other Christian churches or non-Christian groups have been permitted a rather limited exercise of their functions. In this respect, as in others, Stalin has followed the political line of Napoleon who, while adhering to the revolutionary ideals, reorganized the administration of France, reached a concordat with the Holy See, and asserted French hegemony.

The central issue involved in the establishment of diplomatic relationships between Russia and the Vatican is the right of the Church to assert Catholic principles even though they are in conflict with the principles officially professed by the contracting state. Pius XI's Encyclical of March 14, 1937 (*Mit brennender Sorge*), which condemned the religious persecutions within Germany and all racial theories, may at first glance hardly seem to have been written by the same Pope who had signed a concordat with Hitler and was maintaining a nuncio in Berlin. The explanation is that the Pope denounced Nazi policies in the exercise of his function as shepherd of souls. This function is always placed above the one which gives the Pope the sovereign right of legation and diplomatic representation in foreign countries. Pius IX protested against various laws of Napoleon III, of Francis Joseph, and of other chiefs of state in speeches which were strong — according to the style of that Pontiff — and which occasioned vigorous answers.

In the event that relations are established with the Vatican, will the U.S.S.R. tolerate a reaffirmation by the Pope of the Catholic principle that private property is a natural right — a natural right subject, of course, to all the restrictions imposed by solicitude for the common welfare? Will the U.S.S.R. accept papal protests against limitations of religious practice and restrictions of Catholic teaching in the Catholic communities of Russia? The possibilities that such protests would be made must be envisaged, though the Holy See usually limits itself to mild diplomatic steps with countries with which it maintains diplomatic ties, and resorts to public condemnation only when it finds itself obliged to fight back against theories and facts publicized by the other party. (Pius XI resorted to public protest in Fascist Italy with his Encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno*, and with other letters and speeches well known to those who do not want to ignore them.)

If any difficulties should arise with regard to an agreement (based or not on diplomatic ties) between Russia and the Vatican, in my opinion they will come from other sources than Pius XII. Stalin, as in a different sense Churchill and in a less urgent manner Roosevelt, is preoccupied with the basic issue of the equilibrium of Europe. Before the end of the European war we shall see whether the sphere in which Russia will assert a predominant interest will be limited to the triangle Koenigsberg-Instanbul-Trieste, or whether it will extend westward to include

part of Germany, Hungary and Austria. Within such a zone there would be a good many Catholic countries, not to mention the many Catholics who are included within the 16 Soviet Republics, which on the basis of present plans embrace Lithuania and parts of Poland. What will be the fate of these Catholics? Will they be persecuted as under the Tsars, de-Christianized as under Lenin, or forced into paganism or exterminated as under Hitler? Or is it possible to envisage a peaceful coexistence of quasi-sovereign states under the protection of Moscow? And, finally, will Moscow try to carry out full economic collectivization in its new territories and even in the countries within its influence?

It goes without saying that in the event of persecution the Vatican will rush to the moral defense of the local churches, and it will manifest hostility toward experiments based on economic totalitarianism, foreseeing that they would lead to the suppression of civil liberties. I think that Marshal Stalin, who has shown such a complete mastery of himself and a certain cautious adaptation to circumstances, will refrain from pushing things too far, unless he should consider it safer to suppress at the start any opposition coming from the local clergies, military and bourgeois groups, or even from mob pressure. In such case, it is legitimate to believe that if any real influence can be exercised on Stalin, it will come from Great Britain and the United States, whose concern is for a peaceful Europe. Any other kind of intervention would be impractical and might have dangerous repercussions.

There is frequent mention of a supposed "Vatican plan" to block Russian expansion in Europe and the spread of Communist-inspired revolutionary feeling among the masses by reviving the institution of monarchy. Mr. Churchill has been reported as favoring some such plan — perhaps as a result of his support of monarchy in Greece and in Italy — and it is even rumored that the Department of State has backed the idea. The purported goal of these plans is the establishment of monarchies in Austria, Hungary, Bavaria and possibly in France and Spain, and the bolstering of existing monarchies in Italy and Greece. The rumors seem to me absurd. To suggest opposing monarchy to Communism brings to my mind the picture of a paladin of Charlemagne trying to fight a machine gun with his sword.

It is not unusual to find ecclesiastics in Europe who prefer an hereditary king to an elective president. But all other considerations apart, those responsible for Vatican policies are too wide-awake not to perceive the poverty and danger of any such

manœuvre. Vatican support for the alleged project or for others similar to it, such as that of a *cordon sanitaire* against Russia, would make the Holy See an easy target for attacks on the Church as a political agent and for a revived anti-clericalism led by Moscow. And which European monarchy desires to draw upon itself Communist fire and to begin to rule by alienating a large part of the working classes? The success of such a scheme would require a dynastic coalition such as the one which emerged from the Congress of Vienna, sworn to defend the property of all landowners of the aristocratic and bourgeois classes (which as such do not exist any more), and backed by a first-rank Power such as the old Austrian Empire, but with modern armies at its disposal. It is, in short, a scheme for a different century. Who can dream of making Pius XII another Pius VII, to lead a new Restoration? Today there is practically nothing left to restore of the old absolutist feudal and monarchical world. The emergence of Labor parties is the new factor in the world today. The only "restoration" which could offer an alternative to that world movement would be a restored Nazi-Fascist or rightist dictatorship.

The Vatican has suffered under Fascism in Italy for 20 years, and under Nazism for 12 years in Germany, and for four years throughout Europe — not to speak of its ordeals under the various semi-Fascist experiments in other parts of the world. The present war with its unparalleled hatreds, violence, destruction and massacres has been the product of these experiments; the Vatican will be the last to desire their repetition. Talk of an alleged "Vatican plan" is made possible by the tendency of some rightist Catholic groups, not necessarily restricted to Italy, to wish for a measure of authoritarianism, to long for a past in which favors were received by the Church (even though their price was never fully estimated) and, most of all, fears of the future, usually magnified by those who do not bear any responsibility for the reconstruction of the world. It is not to be wondered that Communism should exploit this grey zone of lay and ecclesiastical Catholic opinion for its own ends, and should also exploit the rumors about Vatican policy which are spread by anti-clerical sources, or by journalists feeding upon sensationalism.

### III

American Catholic opinion is rather critical toward Russia owing to fear of Communism and the question of Soviet policy

toward Poland and other Catholic countries, but in Europe collaboration between the Catholic groups and Communists in the underground has produced a certain mutual understanding. This collaboration has carried over into the newly-formed governments in liberated countries. The Christian Democratic Parties in Italy and in France are members of coalitions in which the Communists participate. The same collaboration seems to be taking place elsewhere.

The numerical strength of the parties of Christian Democracy, and the type of their leadership, give them a unique place in liberated Europe. The development of Christian Democracy in social fields, started after the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 1891, assumed significant political proportions after 1919. Popular parties arose in Italy, Czechoslovakia and France; the Christian Democratic wing developed within the Catholic bloc in Belgium, and trade union representation emerged within the Catholic Party in Holland. At that period the various Catholic parliamentary groups of Poland, Lithuania and Spain, the left wings within the Christian Social Parties in Austria and Hungary, and the Center Party in Germany also developed strength. Today we are witnessing the rebirth of that movement, which many believed was forever buried. Fortified by experience, men like Bidault, Minister for Foreign Affairs in the French Provisional Government, Gronchi and de Gasperi, members of the Italian Government, are already bringing significant contributions to the reconstruction of European political life.

These leaders and parties are in agreement with the Communists in the political field as well as in the field of trade union activities. Whatever may be the future of Italy and France, the Catholic Democratic groups of those countries will no longer represent the old clericalism with its systematic opposition to modern parliamentary and democratic institutions and its fear of the social advancement of the working classes. They embody a gradualist revolutionary movement — “revolutionary” in the sense of the American Revolution of 1776. In current American political terminology they would be called progressives. As the convention of the Christian Democratic Party held in Naples in August 1944 declared, they will fight against any new attempt at dictatorship from the right or the left, against mob violence or palace coup.

What position does the Vatican take toward Christian Democracy? There have been doubts and suspicions of Christian



Democracy on the part of ecclesiastical authorities in the past, just as there have been expressions of sympathy and understanding. The same situation will prevail tomorrow. The parties of Christian Democratic inspiration do not ask for Church support or favors. Mindful of the painful experiences of the clerical groups of earlier days, they will carefully refrain from becoming pressure groups in the name of the Church.

The basis of democracy is political freedom. After the totalitarian experiment and the tragedy of Nazi rule it seems about to be rewon throughout Europe. Christian Democrats are convinced that, while vindicating her freedom in tyrannical régimes the Church would in effect get a privileged position, in doing so in democratic régimes she imparts a moral value to freedom for all.

A basic concept of Christian Democracy is the duty of carrying out in political and legislative fields, into the field of labor, of the relations among various classes, those principles which the popes have taught and the social Catholic "school" has developed. Adherence to parliamentary and electoral forms of government is likewise basic. Political coöperation with the Socialists and the Communists for the reconstruction of Europe and the reform of economic institutions may be useful up to a certain point, in these exceptional times. But the Christian Democratic Party is an autonomous party, free to collaborate or to oppose. It will oppose other parties to the degree that they depart from the methods of parliamentary government — that is to say, the methods of freedom.

The Vatican has no reason to oppose these civic and political ideals. It would not be to its interest to favor any party in such a way as to create resentment in others. But surely the Vatican looks with sympathy upon all persons in public life, Christian Democrats or not, who are trying to realize the Christian principles of justice and charity, in domestic or international affairs.

#### IV

All the public activities of the Catholic Church, and particularly of the Holy See, are directed toward teaching, propagandizing and defending Christian principles. Certain methods for achieving this general basic aim are well suited to a given time; others are required in a different period. Pius XI felt that concordats and *modus vivendi* were a guarantee for the Church, and he negotiated them with dictatorships (as with Italy under Mussolini and Germany under Hitler), with Socialist govern-

ments (as with the Braun régime in Prussia under the Weimar Republic) and with democracies (as with Czechoslovakia). Perhaps he was right in so doing. Perhaps he trusted the totalitarian governments too much. Tomorrow, Pius XII will be confronted with new problems. There will be new political leadership in Europe; there will be the inevitable economic and political crisis of the postwar period. The Pope will not be lacking in will, courage or the rapid intuition he has demonstrated in these last years. Above all, he will not lack the steady moral purpose which comes from the highest ethical and religious principles.

The papal defense of Poland has been criticized, and in some quarters the appeal to forgiveness, made by Pope Pius XII to the people of London tortured by five years of cruel warfare, has been misunderstood. Similarly, the statements made by the Pope in favor of a rebirth of Germany, on the occasion of the opening of the academic year at the Germanic College in Rome, have appeared inopportune, at this moment of supreme effort to defeat the enemy in his own land. In that connection we might remember that President Roosevelt has quite recently expressed his religious belief in the innate dignity and worthiness of all men, including the Germans. Can anyone expect the papacy to take a position not designed to heal the wounds of the war? The papacy cannot blindly follow the flags of the victors, even when they are the victors in a just cause as the United Nations will be. The Pope must act as mediator in a suffering world. This does not mean that justice be not applied to enemies and that the precautions necessary for the maintenance of peace should not be taken. But should the Allies deem Germans guilty as a people and embark upon a policy of their destruction as a people, the voice of the Pope will not fail to impress upon them the need of observance of Christian duties even in political life.

Pius XII has repeatedly pointed out the basis of a sound international order. The five points of his Christmas speech of 1939 anticipated the Atlantic Charter by almost two years and still remain the keystone of any lasting international structure. With an ever-present realization of changing needs and popular aspirations, he has outlined the social teachings of the Church with regard to the rights of the working people, the social function of property, and the right of the state to intervene in conflicts of interests and to harmonize them in the light of justice and equity. The practical achievement of these principles is in the hands of society as a whole. Its task of freeing itself from all tyrannies, the

hidden ones which exist even in democratic countries as well as the open ones, will be long and hard. The Catholic Church with its powerful ecclesiastical organization and its firm adherence to principles is not an enemy of the new world which is emerging, but the collaborator in all the efforts which temporal society and its political groups are making to achieve peace and security. Social dynamism will always mean struggle; but those who believe that force plays the decisive part in human events are wrong. Force was not the main element of the Allied victory in 1918, and it will not be that of the victory of the United Nations in 1945. Unless the defense of order, peace and liberty is made upon the basis of fundamental principles accepted by all, the world will renew its bloody past in an even bloodier future. Religion as an urgent need of the soul, the churches as fundamental organisms of society, and the Catholic Church in particular as a traditional organism reaching widely among the populations of the earth, must be accepted as a force integrating and vivifying the ethical spirit of mankind.