

Church and State

by Fr Jonathan Morse

The relationship between the two sources of authority over people's lives can range from a symphony working together to one clashing with the other in discord. It is not just a Christian issue. The Jews have different opinion groups in Israel. While the former Soviet Union was officially atheist, they were either unwilling or unable to make their world atheistic.

The relationship was very close in the pagan world, as we can see in both the Egyptian and Roman empires. Their rulers were divine, and spoke as a god as the pharaoh/emperor. Christianity has a separation. Jesus said in Mark's gospel "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Yet in the first Christian empires, both East and West, there was a symphonic relationship between the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire. Like any other relationship, sometimes it was tense where emperors removed patriarchs and patriarchs excommunicated emperors. But this could only happen when there is an implied relationship between the two. The emperor was supposed to be a member of the faith. In the West, we can see examples where kings were forced to do penance before a bishop for actions that they took as leaders of their state. Sometimes the emperor, for instance, Constantine, had so much authority over the Church that he could call a council to solve a theological problem disrupting the empire. That Council was Nicaea. In many ways, this is where the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian government seemed to be still. The Western churches that attempted to reform the Catholic Church caused a break between the Pope as a spiritual leader and a secular leader, period.

In the United States, the founders of this country wanted unity of church and state. This could be seen in the Mayflower Compact. The moral code of the Puritans became secular law. For example: In Massachusetts one group, the Baptists, had trouble following the Congregationalist or Puritan dictates; they left, and established the colony of Rhode Island. Each colony had a religious influence on the local government. In Pennsylvania, it was the Quakers. In Maryland, depending upon the political situation, it was the Roman Catholics or the Church of England. But when it came time to establish a constitution for the new country, the ideas of the Enlightenment and bringing all the colonies together as one and dissatisfaction with the Church of England and its relationship with some monarch of England became elements in a separation of church and state. While the colonial government and the early governments under the Constitution supported the building of church organizations and the publication of bibles, it is seen as the exception to the rule instead of being the rule.

In time the phrase, "separation of church and state" became the motto of people who did not want a particular church to influence the state. In our contemporary society, this separation of church and state has become highlighted. And yet it is a disguise for a new symphony of the two. Today we have the state (country) being influenced and accepting the influence of Protestantism. Today Jews complain about many antisemitic attacks upon them. They are increasing in number, yet while the government prosecutes the viola-

tors, they haven't done anything to stop prejudicial activity. When Vice President Harris was a senator, she questioned a candidate for a federal judgeship about his membership in the Knights of Columbus. The first complaint was it is all males, and second, it is against abortion. She accused the candidate, by his membership, of being un-American. How could he be impartial in judging on the court because of the viewpoints he held by his membership? An interesting aside is that Senator Ted Kennedy, a leading proponent of abortion, was also a member of the Knights of Columbus. Still, then again, he wasn't trying to be a judge. In many ways, this nation of joiners discourages Catholics from joining groups because the Catholic Church does not hold the same principles our government now tries to advocate. Yet groups like the Masons are held in high esteem because they share the same principles that our government is now advocating.

To be perfectly honest, there was a period of time when Free Masonry was thought to be un-American and biographers of George Washington said he wasn't really a Mason. But that time has passed.

In news reporting of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the media mentions Orthodox churches because they criticize Moscow and its Symphony and ignore Ukraine's respect for the freedom of religion of all believers. At this time, we also have the Supreme Court-leaked decision about overturning *Roe vs Wade*. Once again, there are attacks on Catholic churches, beheading of statues of Mary because we do not hold popular, or Protestant, viewpoints on the same issues as our leaders and government. We have a Catholic president, and we may have a Speaker of the House who is Catholic. Yet, they openly disagree with Catholic Church teachings. They accept the dominant Protestant teaching and the dominant Protestant argument of the separation of church and state. That argument based upon the Constitution is that there should not be a state church, so by being anti-Catholic, they are "proving" there is no state church. Catholics are morally responsible in theory to an outside source, the Pope. Protestants answer locally, which makes it very American. But in reality, Protestantism has become the state Church of the United States, and its moral theology has now found its way into the American government. So our government is determined to create a state church while denying it is doing so. In the past, the Catholic bishops got the attention of some American political figures; they just are ignored by politicians now except to point out how out of touch they are with the American people. Catholics have become a silent minority on the political scene.

Many Protestant moral theologians point out a viewpoint expressed by Catholic politicians John F. Kennedy and Mario Cuomo that the government should not legislate morality. In a sense, the overturning of *Roe vs Wade* is saying that the Federal Government should not legislate morality. Instead, they leave it up to a local or state decision, which will lead to more chaos and more anti-Catholic activity. In reality, this is stopping the Federal Government from acting as a moral authority. Local authority is where authority dwells in Protestantism, so we have even more confusion.

Throughout history, no nation has found a balance between Church and State that is tension-free. This does not mean it is not possible; it just means we haven't yet found a way to do it.