

## Chapter 12

# THE STATE IN WESTERN HISTORY\*

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No more persistent and troubling issue has plagued the modern study of society than the concern for the place or power and authority in social life. Society is no longer rendered cohesive and stable by a common Christian faith and shared values. Modern western society has struggled for three centuries to find new secular humanistic modes of cohesion and stability comparable to the unifying function played by Catholic Christianity in the Middle Ages.

The origins of political sociology lie in the once controversial distinction between *state* and *society*. Ancient and medieval thought concerned itself with the civic order and the political community to which all men belonged. There was no conception of the state as separate from the rest of society. This idea emerged only during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the breakdown of the feudal order. The state emerged in western history as part of the "opening" or unfolding process of cultural development which had as its corollary the breakdown of the power of the undifferentiated primitive communities such as the sib, the clan and the tribe. This process of cultural differentiation was balanced by an increasing cultural integration. From one point of view the role of the state in western history can be envisaged as one of integration. The state appears in the arena of history when primitive, feudal or tribal power structures are broken up by new cultural forces guided by statesmen and rulers and the state holds a monopoly of the power of the sword of justice and of political power. During the later Middle Ages it became apparent to the new monarchs of Western Europe that such political and legal powers must no longer be considered the "private property" of those who happened to own extensive territories but that the ownership of land or other feudal "privileges" and "liberties" must not become the basis for the exercise of political

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power. Instead the exercise of the latter prerogative comes to be seen as a public matter, a *res publica*. We can detect the origins of this legal and political development in the rise of the Roman *Res Publica* on the basis of the earlier tribal political organization between the years 600 BC to 200 BC. It is apparent again in the rise of the modern nation state at the close of the Middle Ages. The first thinker to refer to this development was Jean Bodin.

### **Bodin's idea of the state**

Bodin thought that the disorder facing France in the sixteenth century could be checked only by a clear supremacy of a morally and religiously neutral power, vested in the king himself, extending over every other associative relationship in France. The conflicting feudal jurisdiction of various spheres of law as well as the divisive influences of customs and allegiances that were either local or stemmed from authorities outside France, the bitter religious conflicts of power and the economic disunities - all of these, he felt, could only be checked or terminated by raising the power of the king above all other powers in the realm.

According to Bodin the aim of the state is the maintenance of law and order upon the basis of the king's absolute sovereignty. "Majesty or sovereignty", he declared, "is the most high, absolute and perpetual power over the subjects and citizens in a Commonwealth". He defined the state as "the right government of several families, and of what is common to them, with sovereign power". The word "right" in this definition, implied that the power is exercised for the common good. Bodin was concerned to distinguish between the nobility's rights to their property and their claim to exercise rights of political and legal jurisdiction based upon their feudal land tenure. He insisted that they are quite different in kind since the first kind are exercised for the sake of the second kind. No public office can be a part of any man's private estate, and whoever exercises rights of jurisdiction holds a public office. To hold any public offers, except the highest, is to be the agent of whoever holds the highest office in the state, namely the sovereign himself.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, Abridged and Translated by M.J. Tooley Book 1, chapter 8, p. 32ff. Cf. W. Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought, The Middle Ages*.

The principal mark of the sovereign is his right to impose laws generally on all subjects regardless of their consent. Law presupposes this sovereign context. "Law is nothing else than the command of the sovereign in the exercise of his sovereign power".

<sup>2</sup> The sovereign himself is not bound by his own law nor by that of his predecessors. For Bodin such sovereignty is perpetual because, whoever has it, though he acts through agents, does not lose it; it is also perpetual in the sense that it is *inalienable*. It is absolute because whoever has it, "holds it after God, only by the sword". It is absolute in the sense of unconditional. The sovereign alone makes laws. Law he defines as the "command of the sovereign touching all his subjects generally on general matters".<sup>3</sup> According to Bodin the "prince or people who possess such sovereign power cannot be called to account for their actions by any one save God".

Here then we have the charter of the modern state, a clear statement of absolute authority arising out of Bodin's hatred of the divisive factors of the French wars of religion caused by the Huguenot's demands for religious pluralism. Bodin owns the doubtful distinction of being the first modern political thinker to put forward clearly the conception of sovereignty as the legally unlimited power of making law. That power he taught, is perpetual (i.e., inalienable) and absolute; and he also suggested that it is indivisible, for he denied that there could be a mixed state, that is one in which the supreme law-making power belongs to more than one person or assembly. He distinguished custom from law, saying that law is the sovereign's command and always takes precedence over custom. Now the modern idea of sovereignty is precisely that it is supreme legislative power, "absolute", "inalienable". When sovereignty for example is said to be vested in Parliament or in the Congress, it is not thought of as divided between its members, but as belonging to the whole body.

It is a remarkable achievement of Bodin to have been the first Western thinker to crystalize the conception of sovereign power into words, which is the basis of the development of the modern nation-state. Such a conception of sovereign power, which our apostate twentieth century takes for granted as a political "fact" of modern life was revolutionary and radical in the sixteenth century. Of the tremendous significance of Bodin's novel

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35 Cf. Ernst Gasser. *The Myth of the State*, (Yale, New Haven, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32 Cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order*, (Craig, 1962).

doctrine of the sovereign state Otto Gierke says in *Natural Law and the Theory of the State*:

The state was no longer derived from the divinely ordained harmony of the universal whole ... it was simply explained by itself. The starting point of speculation ceased to be general humanity; it became the individual and self-sufficing sovereign state; and the individual state was regarded as based on a union of individuals, in obedience to the dictates of natural law to form a society armed with sovereign power ... The word sovereignty becomes something in the nature of a magic wand which can conjure up the whole sense and content of the State's general power. From the quality of being simply the highest authority there is deduced the whole of that absolute omnipotence which the modern state claims for itself ... The champions of popular sovereignty vie with the defenders of monarchism in exalting its claim.<sup>4</sup>

Bodin's theory of sovereignty can be viewed as an attempt to defend the rise of the modern nation state, in terms of its explicit need to obtain and maintain a monopoly of political and legal power in society as a guarantee of its stability in the face of internal division and external attack. From this point of view Bodin's effort must be appreciated. The feudal regime of the Middle Ages had offended against the creational norm of integration of society by the state by trying to splinter the power of the sword of justice into a thousand pieces with resulting social anarchy and injustice. Until the power of the sword is held by one organ, namely the state and qualified by justice, there can be no hope for a peaceful and ordered life (1 Tim. 2:3).

But because Bodin lacked an ordering principle for his political science in the Word of God he left his successors with an ambiguity in his conception of sovereignty which has bedevilled modern political thought about the state. As Bernard Zylsta points out in *From Pluralism to Collectivism*:

There is an ambiguity in Bodin's conception ... It appears as if he, in his view about the sources of law, tried to combine a natural law theory with the conception of 'reason of state' (*Staatsraison*). The latter, however, governed his theory

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<sup>4</sup> Otto Gierke, *Natural Law and The Theory of the State*, Vol. 1 pp. 40-41.

concerning the relations between the state and the non-political structures of society, and it is for this reason that the absolutist tradition in the subsequent development of western political philosophy could readily appeal to him. In answer to the question whether 'communities and corporate associations are necessary to the commonwealth?' Bodin replies that this 'is to ask if the commonwealth can subsist without fellowship, which even the world itself cannot do ... To abolish all such societies is to embark on a barbarous tyranny and so ruin the state'. But it must be noted that he does not give these associations an authentic existence alongside the state. The associations, rather, are parts of the totality of the state. For only the latter is characterized by sovereignty. This means in effect, that the non-political social structures can exist only by permission of the sovereign. 'We can therefore say that a corporate association or a guild is a legal right of communal organization, subject to sovereign power. The word legal implies that it is authorized by the sovereign, for without his permission no guild can be instituted.' For this reason Bodin's conception provides the first major link in the development of the absolutist state.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his clear sense of the need for political unity in the state and his insistence upon the legal supremacy of the king over every custom, corporation and association, Bodin's actual conception of society which he expounds in *The Six Books of the Republic* is not very different from what existed in medieval political theory. The family, the civil associations, the corporations and fraternities are all, in his mind, logically and historically antecedent to the state. It is impossible to read the long discussion which Bodin offers on social groups without realizing the value he ascribes to them as agencies of solidarity and control. The associations, for purposes of trade, religious worship, security and fellowship, were bonds of society before any political ties were established and they have continued to perform functions indispensable to social life. It is this distinction between social and political relationships that marks Bodin as a transitional figure between medieval and modern times. When Bodin is thinking of these lesser associations he writes as a legal pluralist; when he is thinking of the state he

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Zylstra, *From Pluralism to Collectivism*, (Van Gorcum, Assen, Holland, 1968), p. 7ff.

writes as a legal monist. In his political thought we observe the emergence of the sovereign nation-state from the whole network of restrictions imposed by medieval custom and religious authority. But for all his ascription to be sovereign of unconditional inalienable powers, Bodin's sovereign remains weak - weak because he only identifies the sovereign power in the state with the monarchy and because he was unwilling to accept the consequences to the other associations in society of his own radical definition of sovereignty.

### **Hobbes' idea of the state**

In the *Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century, the sovereign becomes much stronger. In formal terms the sovereign has the same attributes ascribed by Bodin, but the locus of sovereignty is shifted from the person of the king to the legal institutional state. Now the sovereign is made into a kind of atmosphere of duties and obligations shared by everyone. Each individual, apart from his natural state, exists only in the contemplation of the sovereign. All customs, traditions, and relationships not founded by the state itself become objects of suspicion. In Bodin's thought society and states were distinct, but in Hobbes, state and society are one and the same.

Few writers have exerted such a tremendous influence upon the development of the modern centralized state as Hobbes. The modern state, someone has observed, is an inverted pyramid, its resting upon the 1651 folio edition of Hobbes' *Leviathan*.

Hobbes is at once both an individualist and a utilitarian. The power of the state and the authority of the law are justified only because they contribute to the security of individual human beings. The only rational ground of obedience and political obligation becomes for Hobbes that these will yield a larger individual advantage than their opposites. The classical and medieval *organic* theory of the state gives place in his thought to a purely *mechanistic* and *utilitarian* one. Social well-being and man's need for community disappears and is replaced by a sum of separate selfish interests. Society is merely an artificial body, a collective term for the fact that men find it individually advantageous to exchange goods and services. According to G.H. Sabine:

It is clear cut individualism which makes Hobbes' philosophy the most revolutionary theory of the age ... Well might Clarendon wish that Hobbes had never been born to defend his royal pupil with this sort of argument. For it is a perfect

solvent of all the loyalty, reverence and sentiment upon which the monarchy had rested. With Hobbes the power of tradition is for the first time fully broken by a clear headed and cold-hearted relationship. ... Moreover he caught the spirit which was to animate social thinking for at least two centuries more, the spirit of laissez-faire!<sup>6</sup>

In his great work on *Sovereignty* Bertrand de Jouvenel likewise points out:

The vision of man seen by Hobbes is in essence the modern view, though it is seldom that things are now put as brutally as this. Man is here the measure of his own good; the good is identified with the thing desired by each particular person. Hobbes ... is an individualist. It leaps to the eye that Hobbes is the father of political economy. His representation of man is identical with *homo oeconomicus* ... The Hobbesian notion that each man is the only discerner of his own good provided Adam Smith with the principle that each man is the best judge of his own interest.<sup>7</sup>

For this reason Hobbes detested the interference of such social groupings as family, guild and church with the rights and liberties of the individual and he looked to the sovereign state to reduce the power of such associations over the individual. He does not see in these associations and groups the multifold sources of sociability and order that Bodin had found in them. They are rather breeding areas of dissension, of conflict with the requirements of the unitary state. He even compares associations within the state to "wormes in the entrayles of a naturall man". Economic monopolies of any kind he detested and he was suspicious of the universities because they tended to support ideas and actions that are not in the best interests of the state. Of all associations, it was the church, especially the Church of Rome that Hobbes feared the most. By reason of its tenacious hold upon men's spiritual allegiances, the church will always be a divisive force within **the** political commonwealth unless it is made strictly subordinate to the political power. Of Hobbes political thought Robert A. Nisbet well says in his masterpiece *Community and Power*:

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<sup>6</sup> G.H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, (Harrap, London, 193), p. 467.

<sup>7</sup> Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Sovereignty*, (Cambridge, 1957), p. 23ff. Cf. his book *On Power*.

Despite the severity of Hobbes's attitude toward all associations, despite the centering of all authority in the state, it remains true that for him the power of the state was not an end in itself ... It is the Hobbes did not seek the extermination of individual right but their *individual* whom Hobbes has in his mind as the embodiment of virtue fulfillment. This could be accomplished only by removing social barriers to the individual autonomy. In his eyes the greatest claim of the absolute state lay in its power to create an environment for the individual's pursuit of his natural ends ... However extreme the Leviathan may be, however savage in its rejection of pluralism, localism sectionalism, what Hobbes always has in mind is the creation of an impersonal environment of law within which individuals may pursue rationally their proper interests. It is not the totalitarian state that Hobbes gives us but the necessary political environment of the natural system of liberty which was to become identified later with the Enlightenment in France and England. Later theorists such as Locke could give more space to the rights themselves. But Hobbes, with the spectacle of a still potent residue of medievalism before him, had to give the greater part of his attention to the political environment itself ...

The state that Hobbes gives us is an aggregate of individuals, each free to pursue his proper interests through contract ... each free from the artificial constraints of class, church, guild or any other form of association.<sup>8</sup>

### **The totalitarian democratic idea of the state**

With Rousseau, in the eighteenth century, comes the most formidable and revolutionary of all theories of sovereignty. It is conceived as nothing less than the exalted will of the people, omnipotent and omnipresent. All other forms of relationship are abolished, leaving only the state itself as the community of man's interests and aspirations. Only in the state, Rousseau taught, could the individual find tranquility and relief from the burdens placed upon man by the hypocrisies and uncertainties of traditional society. It is a spiritual refuge even as the church was a refuge from life's uncertainties in the middle ages. For Rousseau there is no morality, no true freedom or community outside the structure of the state. The function of the state is to effectuate the

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<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Nisbet, *Community and Power*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1968), p. 137. Cf. John Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, (Longmans, London, 1967), Vol. I and II.

independence of the individual from society by securing the individual's dependence upon itself. The state is the means by which the individual can be freed of the restrictive tyrannies of family, guild, business, firm, church and all the other associations of society. It is the political means of grace and emancipation which permits the individual to develop the latent goodness in his nature hitherto frustrated by a hostile society. By entering into the pure state, Rousseau declares, "Man's actions receive a moral character which was wanting to them before", and "from a stupid and limited animal he now for the first time becomes a reasoning being and a man". The state is thus of the essence of man's potential being. He believed that man can become moral and rational, only in the state. Since complete independence, under modern conditions is not possible, there must be equal dependence. A truly free society is a society of equals, where no man is the inferior of another, depending on him in ways in which the other does not depend on him; it is a society where all men depend equally on the political community of which they are all active members.

What then in Rousseau's view, is a society of equals? It is a society where in the first place, every man is entitled to take part in making decisions which all are required to obey; where, secondly, the persons who make these decisions do so as individual citizens and not as members of associations smaller than the state and where, thirdly, citizens make the laws themselves and do not elect representatives to do so for them; and where, finally, the body that makes the laws does not administer them.

### **The liberal democratic idea of the state**

In his theory of the state Rousseau was reacting against the liberal idea of the constitutional law-state with its doctrine of the separation of the powers of government into executive, legislative and judicial branches. The liberal idea of democracy is one of tempered or balanced democracy in which the moderating influences upon the will of the masses is effected by a system of checks and balances as in the American Constitution.

Lord Bryce in *The American Commonwealth* has noticed the contrast between the American and French Revolutions in the following words:

Someone has said that the American Government and Constitution are based on the theology of Calvin and the philosophy of Hobbes. This at least is true that there is a hearty Puritanism in the view of human nature which prevades the instrument of 1787. It is the work of men who believed in original sin and were resolved to leave open for transgressors no door which they could possibly shut. Compare this spirit with the enthusiastic optimism of the Frenchmen of 1789. Is it not merely a difference of race temperaments; it is a difference of fundamental ideas.<sup>9</sup>

While the leaders of the French Revolution, inspired by Rousseau's ideas of the revolutionary tribunals proceeded to centralize power in France in the hands of the revolutionary tribunals, the leaders of the American Revolution, inspired by the Puritan doctrine of man's depravity, devised a more careful system of checks and balances upon the abuse of power. In fact the framers of the Constitution left any reference to the word or idea of sovereignty out of the American Constitution. Thanks to their Puritan background not even such deists as Thomas Jefferson or Benjamin Franklin could think of ascribing sovereignty to any mere mortal man. In the American Calvinist tradition of government, the words sovereignty has a theological meaning; sovereignty is an attribute of Almighty God alone. In an address in New York in 1839 on "The Jubilee of the Constitution", John Quincy Adams associated the concepts of omnipotence and sovereignty as essentially one and for this reason, he said, the Americans had resisted the claims of the British Parliament to be sovereign. "From the omnipotence of Parliament the colonists appealed to the rights of man and the omnipotence of the God of battles". Adams then spoke of "The grossly immoral and dishonest doctrine of despotic state sovereignty, the exclusive judge of its own obligations, and responsible to no power on earth or in heaven", as a revival of the old

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<sup>9</sup> Lord Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, (Macmillan Company, London, 1893) 3rd edit. Chapter XXVI. Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Harper 1959), Cf. E.L.H. Taylor, *The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State* (Craig Press, 1966), pp. 49ff, The Answer of the Puritans. R.J. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, (Craig Press, 1964), p. 3 to 49.

doctrine of Parliament's omnipotence. The concept of sovereignty he pointed out, was totally alien to the American political tradition. The power of government must always be limited because it holds the sword of justice from God who alone is sovereign.

Such an American fear of entrusting too much power into the hands of any earthly sovereign state can only be explained by the Puritan doctrine of God's total sovereignty over human life as well as by man's total depravity by his fall into sin. As Reinhold Niebuhr has well said: "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary".<sup>10</sup>

*It is this recognition of God's sovereignty and man's sinfulness which distinguishes the American Revolution from both the French and Bolshevik revolutions. While the latter revolutions were the political expression of man's arrogant belief in the powers of his own reason to redeem himself by political means, the former was the political expression of Christian men's belief that the state is limited under God. In his *Pluralist Democracy in the United States*, Robert A. Dahl sums up the meaning of American democracy as follows:*

The United States has limited the sovereignty of the majority in many ways. In fact, the United States has gone so far in this direction that it is sometimes called a pluralistic system ... The fundamental axiom in the theory and practise of American pluralism is, I believe, this: Instead of a single center of sovereign power there must be multiple centers of power, none of which is or can be wholly sovereign. Although the only legitimate sovereign is the people, in the perspective of American pluralism even the people ought never to be an absolute sovereign; consequently no part of the people, such as a majority, ought to be absolutely sovereign.

Why this axiom? The theory and practise of American pluralism tend to assume, as I see it, that the existence of multiple centers of power, none of which is wholly sovereign, will be (may indeed be necessary) to tame power, to secure the consent of all, and to settle conflicts peacefully.

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<sup>10</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, (Nisbet), p. vi (A Vindication of Democracy).

Because one center of power is set against another, power itself will be tamed, civilized, controlled, and limited to decent human purposes, while coercion, the most evil form of power will be reduced to a minimum.

Because even minorities are provided with opportunities to veto solutions they strongly object to, the consent of all will be won in the long run.

Because constant negotiations among different centers of power are necessary in order to make decisions, citizens and leaders will perfect the precious art of dealing peacefully with their conflicts.<sup>11</sup>

### **Rousseau's idea of the state**

Opposed to this political pluralism is Rousseau's radical doctrine of totalitarian democracy which rejects the representative institutions of government because they only thwart the general will of the people. So far from fearing the powers of the state Rousseau and all succeeding totalitarian democrats seek to enhance them since in their view the main purpose of politics lies exactly in the freedom which the state can confer upon the citizen. It alone can provide him with his inalienable rights of the citizen in which the rights of man receive public legal expression. *Life is politics*.

The guarantee of man's autonomous individual freedom by means of his direct participation in the affairs of government became for Rousseau almost a religious obsession. *The state in short is to become man's savior in place of the decaying Roman Catholic Church*. Nothing in this free self-determination must be lost by man in the change from the state of nature to the civil state. And this would be the case if man were to give up his natural freedom only in part in the social contract without getting back integrally in a higher form, in the inalienable rights of an active citizenship.

The representative system of government as this operated in England and America meant a principal attack upon man's free self-determination for Rousseau. The sovereign people and their general will can never be represented, since this

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<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States*, (Rand McNally Co. Chicago, 1967), p. 24. Cf. J.H. Nichols, *Democracy and the Churches*, (Westminster).

institution compels the people to delegate their inalienable rights to self-determination to an elite which can then impose its particular sectional interest upon the people thus making it a slave.

For the same reason Rousseau and succeeding totalitarian democrats also reject the liberal democratic doctrine of the separation of the powers of government. The sovereign self-determination is also indivisible. A man can no more be half free than he can be half chaste.

Thus in Rousseau's teaching the social contract became democratized. It is understood in such a way that individuals delegate all their natural freedom to the body politic only to receive this freedom back again as members of the all-inclusive state in this higher state sense. Every citizen without distinction, in this peoples democracy, becomes a part of the sovereign body of people which makes its own laws. The right of giving laws is the primary right of the sovereign people themselves and cannot be delegated.

In the actual practice of such totalitarian democracies the people of course never make the laws but are forced to obey the edicts of which ever group manages to seize power in the state. Hence the emergence of the revolutionary tribunals during the French Revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat during the Bolshevik revolution. Of the close connection between the Marxism and French liberalism, George Lichtheim writes:

It was only in the late 18th century that the dissolution of the traditional religious worldview gave rise to the modern secularism, and it was then that the French Revolution proclaimed a totally new conception of politics as the application of rational principles to human affairs. This breakthrough has determined the entire history of 19th century Europe, and placed its stamp upon liberalism and socialism alike. These two movements, for all their antithetical views of society, are ideological twins.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> George Lichtheim, *Marxism*, (Routledge: London, 1967), p. 402. Cf. Gary North, *Mane's Religion of Revolution*, (Craig Press, 1968).

Rousseau was the master theorist of Continental democracy, as was John Locke of Anglo-American democracy. Both were devout deists. Both elaborated theorists of social compact and popular sovereignty; the one, however, produced a liberal and limited government under law; the other, an absolute and unlimited despotism of the majority. From Geneva, Rousseau carried over only such elements as could be combined with the politics of pagan Greece, or of the Jesuits. Rousseau's social compact, like the vows of a Jesuit, alienate forever all rights and grounds of appeal from the community. The social compact gives the body politics absolute power over all its members. There is no higher law to which men can appeal in God's Word against tyranny; instead the general will is the source of all laws. The general will is the criterion of morals, of what is just and unjust. *The voice of the people is in fact the voice of God, just as for the Jesuits the voice of the pope was the voice of God, or for the Marxist the party is the voice of God.* Liberty is participation in the ruling party of a one-party state. And just as the Inquisitor coerced the suspected heretic, so Rousseau's citizens and those of the totalitarian democracies of Russia and Red China, of which he is the spiritual progenitor, are forced to be free. The Jacobins of the French Revolution may thus be seen as inverted Catholics and from the Revolution on the two dogmatic systems were to struggle without mercy. Neither was ever to understand the first principles of Anglo-American liberal democracy, how a responsible person faces a moral decision on principles rather than by the authority of mere man, and how new truth can be discovered from God's Word by discussion in the power of the Holy Spirit. *Just as Aquinas has absolutized the church so Rousseau now deified the state.*

### **The Christian basis of political pluralism**

Our Anglo-American doctrine of the limited state grew inevitably out of the Puritan demand for freedom of conscience. The principle of religious freedom won during the English civil war established the principle of the limitation of political authority. If the government has no right to interfere with the religious life of its people then there is a department of social life (of what Calvin called the realm of things indifferent) in which the political authority as such has no competence. *Democracy as we understand the term in America, Britain, Holland and Canada is this denial of the omnipotence and absolute*

*sovereignty of the state*. The opposite of democracy is, therefore, totalitarianism, which rests on the claim of the state to have legitimate authority in every department of life. The recognition of the great principle of freedom of conscience to worship God as each man sees fit without interference by the government also implied the freedom of all other cultural activities. It implied and achieved in the course of two centuries freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of education and learning, of art and science and business life from control by the state. As John MacMurray says in *Constructive Democracy*: "The implication of religious toleration run through all our democratic liberties - freedom of speech, freedom of thought, of the press, of cultural association, of public criticism. For it accepts the principle that man is more than the citizen, and that the state is merely an aspect, and not the most important aspect of the community"<sup>13</sup>

Long before the English and Dutch people, for example, gained political liberty they had achieved the liberty to worship God freely, and to govern their churches without interference from the state. The principle of congregationalism in religion meant that authority lay in the group as a whole, and not in a privileged hierarchy or elite, and that the individual had the right to follow his conscience in his religious beliefs. This religious congregationalism of the Puritans and other non-conformists was later applied to politics with results that had tremendous impact. It led to the doctrine that political authority rested with the people, who were the true rulers under God, and that the government was no more than the agent of the community ministering to its communal needs, as its servant and not its master. *Unlike totalitarian democrats, Puritan democrats believed that life is religion.*

The freedom of conscience in religion as transplanted to Anglo-American politics inevitably led to the concept of basic civil rights as incorporated in the English Bill of Rights (1689) and in the First Ten Amendments to the Constitution of the United States (1791), particularly the First Amendment, which guarantees the freedom of religion (listed first), speech, press, assembly, and petition. Of this Puritan influence

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<sup>13</sup> John MacMurray, *Constructive Democracy*, (Faber and Faber, London, 194p), p. 12. Cf. A.D. Lindsay, *The Churches and Democracy*, (Epworth Press, London, 1934) p. 24ff. For a good study of totalitarian democracy, see Tatman's two works on the subject.

upon the development of the great Protestant democracies William Ebenstein says in *American Democracy in World Perspective*:

"If citizens of free societies at times underestimate religious liberty as the root of all other liberties, totalitarian states never make that mistake. Both Nazi Germany and Communist Russia clearly understood from their beginning that religious liberty was the first, and most implacable, enemy of human oppression. Yet neither fascism or communism has been able to eradicate religion.

"The refusal of the democratic, liberal state to interfere in religious matters is not based on indifference. On the contrary, precisely because it holds religion in such high esteem, the free society is unwilling to favor one religious viewpoint over another. By granting tax-exemption to religious schools (as to other private schools), the government of free societies indirectly subsidizes them. In some political societies, as in Holland and England, the state even directly pays, wholly or partly, for the maintenance of private schools - mostly religious - on the theory that the parents have the right to decide the type of education their children are to receive, because the educational philosophies of public schools may not be valid for all people at all times. For reasons of history and tradition, government in the United States does not go that far in its support of religious schools, but the pressure to go further than that has been the customary practice".<sup>14</sup>

### ***Overcoming étatism in America today***

In his great work *Democracy in America*, Alexis Baron de Tocqueville warned America that her great heritage would be endangered by the centralizing trends of modern society: industrialization, bureaucratization, massification and nationalism. He recognized that these processes would bring the lower classes into politics and thus politics would no longer be the prerogative of aristocratic elites. At the same time unless such masses were involved as responsible citizens in the democratic process unscrupulous politicians would arise who would exploit the people's

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<sup>14</sup> William Ebenstein, C. Herman Pritchett, Henry A. Turner and Dean Mann, *American Democracy in World Perspective*, (Harper and Row, New York, 1967), p.26.

demands for an easy life.<sup>15</sup> The great threat to democracy and liberty he found in *étatisme*.

The trends de Tocqueville discerned in 1831 have continued, made necessary by the powerful demand for national coordination and by the fact that the liberal value prescribing a sharp distinction among political, economic, and other segments of the society is less and less a description of reality. Economy and polity are now integrated as a political economy, and there is increasing concentration of decision-making at the federal and national level of government. Significant decisions that affect the life-chances of all citizens are increasingly political and national, with private and local structures declining in their capacity to render or even participate in these decisions.

The solution that de Tocqueville offered to the dangers of centralization of power in the state was the conception of the pluralist society - one in which there are several sources of power other than the state, and in which there is a potentiality for engaging in conflict and struggling for goals against other groups. Thus conflict by a single center of power.

De Tocqueville thought that in America he saw in the *local self- government community* and the *voluntary association* the significant sources for a pluralism of power. These were to create active sources of political engagement, experience and training for citizens. They were also to generate new centers of power that could contest both among each other and with a limited state for a basis for a democratic consensus.

De Tocqueville realized that a mass of unorganized aggregates of individual citizens could never counter the centralized power of the modern state. Intermediate political organization and cultural associations that had free access to masses of citizens and opportunity to organize them to engage in political contest or cultural

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<sup>15</sup> Alexis de Toequerville, *Democracy in America*. (Vintage Books, New York, 1954), Vols. 1 and 11. Cf. W.E.H. Lecky, *Democracy and Liberty*, (Longmans, Green, London, 1912) and Cf. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*. (Free Press, N.Y. 1947). For an account of de Tocqueville's visit see J.A. Garraty, *The American Nation*.

achievement, was a guarantee of a democratic society. This conception of the pluralist society has become by now one of the major intellectual perspectives on modern society and at that same time the definition of one political sociology's most significant problems.

Yet as William Kornhauser has noted in *The Politics of Mass Society*, the mere fact of a multiplicity of associations in a society does not necessarily provide the conditions of pluralism that alone can assure the survival of personal and communal freedoms. The population of a society could be organized into a set of associations that merely served the interests of the state as in the case of the Hitler youth. He therefore argues that what is required for a pluralist society is a multiplicity of affiliations, wherein no one group is inclusive of its members lives. Thus trade unions have members of various ethnic and religious groups, churches cut across class lines, and political parties draw from a heterogeneous range within the population. Such extensive crosscutting affiliations prevent one line of social cleavage, such as class from becoming dominant.

In Kornhauser's view an essential condition for a liberal democracy is the existence of a number of autonomous secondary associations which reduces the vulnerability of their members to domination by elites. In other words, it is to the pluralist type of society to which Kornhauser turns as a protection against any trend towards totalitarian democracy. He writes:

In summary, a liberal democracy requires widespread participation in the selection of leaders, and a large amount of self-governing activity on the part of non-elites. It also requires competition among leaders and would-be leaders, and a considerable autonomy for those who win positions of leadership. The basic question arises, what kind of social structure will meet these conditions of liberal democracy? The theory of mass society expounded in the present study implies that social pluralism is a social arrangement which performs this function. A plurality of independents and limited-function groups support liberal democracy by providing social bases of free and open competition for leadership, widespread participation in the selection of leaders, restraint in the application of pressures on leaders, and self-government in wide areas of social life. Therefore, where social pluralism is

strong, liberty and democracy tend to be strong; and conversely, forces which weaken social pluralism also weaken liberty and democracy.<sup>16</sup>

While welcoming Kornhauser's thesis we would conclude this essay by pointing out that liberty and democracy do not merely depend upon the existence of autonomous sovereign spheres. If the cultural and social institutions of modern society are genuinely seeking to express and maintain their own normative internal structural principles they will maintain an authentic existence of their own which need not be derived from nor be beholden to the state. But here as in the realm of personal freedoms the condition of corporate freedoms no less than of individual freedoms is eternal vigilance. Unless the desire to remain independent of state control exists in the human heart no social institution as such can hope to resist encroachment by the Leviathan state. Such a will to freedom and to democracy has in actual historical experience been found to arise only out of a living faith in the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This should not be surprising for did not the Lord Christ tell us "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", (John 14:6). Only as we walk in His way, believe in His truth and share in His life by the power of the Holy Spirit can we hope to remain free of domination by the apostate forces of darkness both at home and abroad which are today seeking to destroy the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Unless we first acknowledge the Sovereign Law-giver of creation we will not respect the sphere-laws and social groupings He has laid down in human society. Only the Gospel of Christ can provide the religious motivation and moral attitude and dynamic that alone makes political and legal pluralism possible and vital.

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<sup>16</sup> William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, (The Free Press New York, 1968), p. 230. Cf. Herman Dooyeweerd, *The Christian Idea of the State*, (Craig). Cf. Seymour Martin Upret, *Political Man, the Social Bases of Politics* (Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1963), pp. 70 to 69 for a discussion of the role played by Protestantism in the rise of democracy. Seymour Martin Upret, "Political Sociology, in *Sociology Today*, (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1965), Vol 1. pp. 81 to 114.