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PAPAL JURISDICTION III

By D.B. Knox

"The Protestant Faith"

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You may have read in the daily newspapers recently that the ambassador from the Vatican Archbishop Gino Paro has now taken up his residence at Canberra. This is the first time since the Reformation that our government has recognised the temporal sovereignty of the Pope in civil affairs and it is likely to have important effects on Australian life and foreign policies in the decades to come if this recognition is not revoked.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of the temporal sovereignty of the Pope is quite clear. In brief, it is that the Pope is supreme over the temporal affairs of nations as well as over the spiritual lives of individuals. The matter was put very clearly and unequivocally by Pope Boniface VIII in his famous Bull *Unam Sanctam* of 1302. The Pope's Bull states "in the church and in her power are two swords, the spiritual and the temporal ... Both are in the power of the church, the spiritual sword and the material sword. But the latter is to be used for the church, the former by her; the former by the priest, the latter by kings and captains but at the will and by the permission of the priest. The one sword then should be under the other, and the temporal authority subject to the spiritual. The spiritual power can both establish the earthly power and judge it, if it proves to be no good" (Bettinson, Documents page 160). This is a clear statement that the Pope is supreme over national policies and civil governments.

Perhaps the most conspicuous use of this papal power in English history was the papal Bull *Regnans in Excelsis* by which the Pope deposed Queen Elizabeth I from her throne, and called upon all her subjects to rebel against her moreover he directed foreign nations to wage war on England to carry out this de-position. The Pope's Bull said "We declare Elizabeth a heretic ... and those who cleave to her ... to have incurred the sentence of anathema ... moreover, we declare her to be deprived of her pretended right to the realm of England and from all dominion, dignity, and privilege whatsoever. And the nobles, subjects and peoples of the said realm and all others who have taken an oath of any kind to her we declare to be absolved forever from such oaths ... and we enjoin and forbid all the several



nobles etc., that they presume not to obey her and her admonitions, commands and laws, all who disobey our command we involve in the same sentence of anathema" (Bettinson page 338). As you will see from this language, no conscientious Roman Catholic in England had any other option than to support the overthrow of the Queen. The Pope had made every Roman Catholic in England a potential traitor.

As a result of this Bull, as we all know, Philip II launched the Spanish Armada against England to carry out the Pope's directive that Queen Elizabeth should be deposed. At the same time many Roman Catholic subjects in England conspired against the Queen and sought to set up Mary Queen of Scots in her place. Not surprisingly the English government felt obliged to arrest and execute such conspirators and those actively approving the Bull deposing the Queen. The Roman Catholic Church regarded and still regards these as martyrs because their actions were dictated by their religious obedience to the Pope.

The claim of jurisdiction over every civil government so clearly stated in Unam Sanctam, is by no means a dead letter. For example, the Bull Unam Sanctam is still printed in the Roman Catholic doctrine documents (e.g. Denzinger 469) and is still quoted in the text books of theology as being a foundation statement of Roman Catholic doctrine. It may be true that at the present time because many Roman Catholics do not believe that these things should be done. But that is not the question, the question is whether the Roman Catholic system, focused in the Vatican, still approves these principles and acts on them when it has the opportunity. It is not the views of individual Roman Catholics, to which objection is made but to the doctrinal system and the practices based on it.

There has not been any authoritative disapproval in the Roman Catholic claim for temporal authority. As I have said, many Roman Catholics in the days of Queen Elizabeth I (and into the reign of James I - for example Guy Fawkes) felt obliged by the Papal Bull to overthrow the English government. When they were caught, they were actually executed as traitors. But the Roman Catholic church equally naturally regarded them as martyrs since they died in accordance with their religious

principles. Recent events show that these things are not merely old history, that these principles of supremacy of the Pope over civil governments are still those of the vatican, is exemplified by the fact that the present Pope has recently canonised as saints some of those who were executed by the government of that time.

Another indication, slight in itself, that the Roman Catholic Church still claims supremacy in temporal affairs and in civil government is the fact that the Vatican will not describe its Ambassador at Canberra as a Nuncio but only a pro-Nuncio. A Nuncio is the normal title for a Vatican Ambassador to a foreign government, but the Vatican only allows this title to be used when the government concerned recognises the supremacy of the Papal authority as superior to all other governments, by the Papal Nuncio being the Dean or chief amongst the Ambassadors in the capital concerned. If he is not automatically recognised as the head of the diplomatic corps, then the Vatican will not call him a Nuncio, but only a pro-Nuncio.

Neither the United States of America nor the United Kingdom has accepted a Papal Nuncio or pro-Nuncio in the way that the present Australian government has. Already the Australian pro-Nuncio has announced in the daily papers ('Australian' April 13, 1974 page 15) that he is pressurising the Australian government to adopt the policies of the Vatican on birth control and other moral issues. He has acknowledged this publicly; we cannot believe that his influence and pressure on the government will be confined to the issues mentioned in the papers.

It may well be that our present Prime Minister will resist pressures from the Papal Pro-Nuncio. But governments come and go and what if a pious Roman Catholic becomes Prime Minister in the future, as there have been in the past, will he be able to resist the pressures on his conscious that the Vatican pro-Nuncio will exert to make him conform the internal and foreign policies of the Australian Government to what the Vatican believes to be best. The Roman Catholic



doctrine is quite clear. The Prime Minister must do what the Nuncio says in all matters which the Church believes to be within its sphere. I quote from 'Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine' a book written by a former Roman Catholic coadjutor Archbishop of Sydney, and which has been used widely to teach children in Roman Catholic schools in Australia. On page 200 Archbishop Sheehan writes "In cases of conflict, the State ... must yield to the Church".

We may well ask why should a religion which represents a minority of Australian people be represented at Canberra and get special privileges in influencing government policy?

We are very foolish as the Australian nation to take this system into such close quarters as accepting a Vatican Ambassador and so tacitly acknowledging the legitimacy of the claim of the Roman Catholic church to exercise power over civil government.

This claim by a christian denomination to exercise temporal sovereignty as exemplified by the presence of the pro-Nuncio at Canberra, is without any scriptural support.

Pope Boniface VIII in the Bull Unam Sanctam certainly quoted the Bible to support the doctrine, saying that Jesus had given Peter two swords, but of course, the passage has no reference to any scripture or temporal authority. In fact Jesus warned his disciples not to imitate the methods of the world. Coercion - as represented by a sword is not the matter of the Gospel. It is not the way of Jesus. Christians and the Christian Church serve God's kingdom by following the example of Jesus, that is by prayer and by teaching ("praying always" and "teaching in season and out of season") by witnessing and by suffering, even to death, knowing that although events may seem to sweep it all away, our work will not be in vain in the Lord; God will bring in his kingdom by our faithfulness. He will accomplish his purpose of throwing down the strongholds of Satan, if we follow the example of Jesus who used no pressure besides the influence of a good life and true teaching. His word is the sword of the Christian. As Luther said "Let the Word do it". Let each of us be constant in our prayer for our

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country, our government and our friends and acquaintances,  
and let us be alert to opportunities of teaching the Christian  
truth.

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