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PAPAL JURISDICTION II

by D.B. Knox

The Protestant Faith

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You may have noticed in the daily paper this week that the Prime Minister has agreed to appoint an Australian ambassador to the Vatican and to receive to Australia a papal ambassador or nuncio. Never since the Reformation has our government recognised in this way Roman Catholic claims to political power. This decision is not in the interests of the Australian people. It puts the Roman Catholic church in a position of privilege for it gives it a spokesman with diplomatic immunity who has direct access to the Prime Minister. It increases the political power of the Pope in Australia by giving him this direct high ranking official on the Australian political scene.

The claims of the papacy to exercise complete political authority in every christian nation is of long standing and was well expressed in the famous bull of Pope Boniface VIII called Unam Sanctam issued in 1302. The Pope said "There is one holy catholic and apostolic church outside of which there is neither salvation nor remission of sins. Both swords, the spiritual and the temporal are in the power of the church; the one indeed to be wielded for the church, the other by the church; the one by the hands of the priest, the other by the hand of kings or knights, but at the will and sufferance of the priest. One sword, moreover, ought to be under the other, and the temporal power to be subject to the spiritual" The bull concludes "It is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff". The Papal Encyclicals - Fremantle pp.72-74

The most conspicuous use of this claim to temporal power was the Pope's attempt to depose Queen Elizabeth I of England in 1570 and the sending against England of the Spanish Armada in 1587.

This bull Unam Sanctam is by no means a dead letter. It is quoted in the modern Roman Catholic text books as an authoritative document stating the doctrine of the Roman Catholic church. The present pope is not the man to abandon any long established Roman Catholic position.

History shows that the papacy always uses its political power to advance its religious authority. This religious authority

takes the form of a spiritual dictatorship by the Pope over the consciences of those who adhere to the Roman Catholic religion. Roman Catholics are required to do and to believe as the Pope directs. It is very difficult for a Roman Catholic to leave that communion so long as he retains any Christianity at all because of the spiritual threats that are made of hell for those who leave. The pope claims, moreover, authority not only over Roman Catholics but over all Christians, and the Vatican policy is directed to making this claim effective. It is a matter, therefore, of very great concern to all Australians that the papal authority should receive this boost in Australia by the recognition of papal political power through the appointment of a papal nuncio to Canberra.

Those who oppose papal political power are often regarded as religious bigots, but this opinion reflects ignorance. It must be realised that the unique character of the papal authority in the Roman Catholic religion has no correspondence in any of the other denominations, and of course it is directly contrary to the religion of the Bible. It is because of this distinctive characteristic of papal spiritual dictatorship that Christian leaders have refrained from religious fraternising with the pope in his religious capacity. Certainly Christians of all denominations should be able to get along with one another very happily, including laity, clergy and bishops of the different denominations. But the papal position is quite distinct. The Pope, is as I say, a spiritual dictator and he uses his position to nip in the bud any spiritual movement that might arise in the Roman church.

History contains many examples of this but may I point you, by way of illustration, to one that took place within the last few months. There has been growing up, since the second Vatican Council, in the Church of Rome the custom of leaving aside private confession of sins to the priest in which every sin has to be related in full detail in order that the priest might act as a judge in God's place and forgive the sin. In its place there has been growing up the custom of general confession of sins in the congregation and of receiving in the congregation the declaration of God's forgiveness to the penitent sinner.

This latter method of confessing sins and of receiving absolution is, of course, in accordance with biblical principles, while the other way of confessing your sin in detail to a priest who stands in the place of God is directly opposed to the principles of the Bible. However, the Vatican through the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly known as the Inquisition) has sought to put an end to this new development by issuing "a reprobation of the recent custom that has sprung up of obtaining absolution by confession made only generally". It goes on to insist that "individualconfession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to be reconciled to God". (Catholic Documentation Sept. 1972 p. 181). Here is a good example of the papal dictatorship nipping in the bud spiritual development which seeks to return to scriptural principles. Laity and clergy and bishops are required to conform without alternative. This dictatorship takes the form of numerous laws and canons which Roman Catholics must obey. To disregard these papal laws is said to be a mortal sin condemning one to hell. How then can knowledgeable Christians have religious fellowship with the Pope as the representative of this system? It is true that there are some attempts at reform from within, but these are not directed at the root cause which is the jurisdiction of the papacy over the souls and bodies of its adherents. The Pope directs not only how people should think but how they should live. This is why he claims political power, and the acceptance of a papal nuncio at Canberra is an admission of the papal claims. It must be remembered that the political power of the Pope asserted for centuries is absolutely denied by the Church of England at the time of the Reformation is desired by the papacy only for the purpose of being able to impose his jurisdiction on how people should act in their moral and religious life.

We protestants often think that the most obnoxious feature of the papacy is its claim of infallibility, and Hans Kung the Roman Catholic theologian has recently written a book attacking papal infallibility; but papal infallibility has only been a part of the Roman Catholic faith since 1870. Papal jurisdiction, however, goes back for over a thousand years and it is the papal jurisdiction which is the source of the papal dictatorship.

You may not like this term 'dictator' but it is a true description of what the facts of the situation are. What other term is to be used to describe the action of the present Pope in setting aside the overwhelming advice of his theologians that married couples may use contraceptives. The Pope on his own decision declared that it is God's mind that all contraceptives are sinful, so that those who use them deliberately will undoubtedly go to hell. This is spiritual dictatorship in an area where God allows each individual couple to make their own decisions and since it imposes real hardship, it is not improper to call this dictatorship tyranny. How else can one describe the Pope's recent decision to continue to impose the rule of celibacy on candidates for the ministry, so that young people, eager to serve God, are required to bear this burden of denying themselves the strength and fellowship that comes through the companionship of marriage which God created for all. It is admitted by all Roman Catholics that there is no command to that effect in the Bible. The Pope again has made this decision on his own, contrary to the general feeling of large sections of the Roman Catholic church. There is no hope for spiritual renewal while this papal dictatorship continues, for no sooner do people begin to **recover** the truth through the study of the scriptures and prayer and reflection than the conservative elements of the Vatican, using the papal jurisdiction, forbids this development. It has happened throughout the centuries and it is still happening. It is not very pleasant to have to speak in these terms, but the facts are much more unpleasant for those who are suffering under them. I am not speaking, of course, about the Pope as a man, for the present Pope is, I believe, a humble and sincere man, anxious to do what he believes best for the church, but I am speaking of the office of the Pope and the jurisdiction exercised by the Pope, whoever he may be. Long ago Archbishop Cranmer, while still a Roman Catholic, saw the enormity of this spiritual dictatorship and prayed that God would remove papal jurisdiction from England. Some years later that prayer was answered. We ought to pray earnestly that God would remove this authoritative papal jurisdiction from the Roman Catholic Church and from the

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world, completely, so that our Roman Catholic brethren may follow what God's Spirit is teaching them through God's Word, without having this growth in knowledge nipped in the bud and their consciences thrust back into the darkness of the past.

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