

CHAPTER V

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Aside from its army the Roman Catholic church was the most solid pillar of the Habsburg dynasty. The Habsburg dynasty, as we saw in our historical survey, helped the church with its entire political and military force and by the most brutal instruments in the execution of the counter-reformation and in reconquering the countries which had become to a large extent Protestant. On the other hand, Rome becoming again victorious, put at the disposition of the Emperor without reserve its own spiritual, moral, and political forces in making the empire united, centralized, and loyal. In periods when the church represented almost exclusively the higher spiritual culture, its assistance had a paramount importance for it held in its hands the whole spiritual and educational organization. But even later when general lay-culture became preponderant or even when the state tried to push back the power of the church in legal and educational matters (for instance, under Joseph II or in the sixties of the last century when the Concordat was abolished in Austria and a long series of liberal reforms introduced; or in Hungary in the nineties of the last century when important laws such as civil marriage and marriage between Jews and Christians were passed in the field of church policy), the political and moral power of the Roman church did not suffer any real damage. Nay, those attacks of militant liberalism led rather to a more conscious and efficacious organization of the clerical forces.

This immense power of the church was based on several factors. The backward cultural condition of the rural masses; the colossal donations given by the dynasty which made the Roman Catholic church of the monarchy the most opulent in Europe; the imposing splendor of the Church which developed a great religious art, the brilliancy of which constitutes even now the greatest heritage of the artistic past of the empire; the establishment of humanitarian and educational institutions in times when state activity did not embrace those fields; its constitutional privileges by which it influenced, to a large extent, the legislature; the broader and more international perspective of its leading elements which far surpassed the mentality of the representatives of the Protestant churches were factors which with others, contributed to the exceptional power and authority of the Roman Catholic church.

Generally speaking one might say that ecclesiastical feudalism combined all the material powers of lay feudalism with the force of spiritual culture and with the spell of a transcendental authority.

But the bulk of its powers was still based on its immense landed estates which held the widest strata of peasant populations in its material and moral dependency. It is therefore quite natural that such an enormous historical and economic power had a paramount leading rôle above the masses. This power continued almost unaltered even in modern times; but feeling its unrivaled forces and privileges, it became more and more mechanical and ceremonial. It increasingly developed into a political and powerful organization, into a *political antidote* of the Habsburgs, against the rising classes of society, an organization which drew its energies less and less from the popular soil but almost exclusively from the riches and jural privileges imparted to it by the Emperor. That the majority of the social democratic working-people of the monarchy grew not only anti-clerical but outspokenly atheistic was manifestly connected with this attitude of the church. At the same time its moral influence, taken in a subtler sense, was negligible even on the masses which stood under its exclusive sway. Negligible even in fields the significance of which was overemphasized by the church. Though it carried on a constant fight against illegal sexual relations and for the indissolubility of marriage and though it was supported in its endeavor by the ideology of the court nobody could assert that the church was really successful in the raising of the moral atmosphere. At the same time when, in the first decade of the present century, it was capable of subscribing 4,500,000 names against a petition which favored dissolving marriages under certain conditions, the proportion of illegitimate births in Austria was the worst in all Europe and record figures were reached in those regions of the monarchy where the moral authority of the church was the most uncontested. Similarly the dogma of celibacy was very incompletely fulfilled by the church itself and the illegitimate family life of the country clergy was proverbial and the rôle of the clergyman's cook was a standing cheap joke in all the humorous papers.

Also in the higher spheres of education the function of the church was not favorable to the building up of a modern type of civic education. The famous Jesuit colleges in Kalksburg and Feldkirch, where the offspring of the aristocratic and wealthy classes were educated, produced a type of man characterized by a certain feudal rigidity with not much sympathy toward the modern democratic and social problems. Those older and richly endowed orders, which as the Benedictines, the Cistercians, and the Augustines represented a freer and more worldly spirit, came into a growing conflict with a very influential current of the church, led by the Jesuits who fought both the looser discipline and the outspoken German spirit and culture of these orders.

For, if we disregard certain individual exceptions which can be motivated by individual interests or predilections, we witness that the

Roman Catholic church as a whole was remote from any German nationalist tendencies and was rather inclined toward a Slavophile policy. This attitude of great consequence had several causes. Before all, the universalist spirit of Catholicism was not in favor of accentuating the differences between national particularisms. A further cause was the clear intellectual vision of the fact that to Austria, having a Slav majority, the idea of a Habsburg united monarchy of which the church was its main moral exponent was irreconcilable with the neglect or repudiation of Slav intellectual and cultural endeavors. Another factor which worked in the same direction was that the Germans, as the most cultured element of the empire, did not remain so much in the tow of the church as the Slav, Polish, Slovak, Croat, and Slovenian masses who were on a lower cultural standing and who continued to be unchanged vassals of the church power.¹ But there was another cause, perhaps even more important, which explains this pro-Slav attitude: the national liberalism of the church was only an expression of that traditional antagonism and antipathy which divided Catholic Austria from its rival, Protestant Prussia. We witness indeed that the church tried to smooth the national divergencies in the monarchy in a Slavophile direction, the more so because, until the eighties of the last century, the German hegemony was not seriously endangered in Austria. But even at the times when the struggle between the Germans and the Slavs became very acute and, when under the régime of Count Taaffe, the so-called process of Slavization began, the German clericals were the most outstanding supporters of that *Eiserner Ring* (iron circle) which made this policy workable, a coalition between all the clerical and feudal elements of Austria. Even the author of that ill-famed *Lex Falkenhayn* which in 1897 (when the linguistic decrees of Count Badeni aroused the vehement opposition of the Germans) tried to break down the obstruction of the Germans by force, was the German clerical deputy, Count Falkenhayn.

We must not forget in this connection that the German elements were always the *beati possidentes* of power and it is a well-known psychological fact that the defenders of antiquated privileges never reach the moral enthusiasm of those who fight for a newer and juster compromise. Therefore, the German elements of the clergy were of a cooler and more sober mind, whereas some Slav members of the Roman Catholic church became really the most outstanding leaders of their people in the fight for national emancipation. Briefly stated, the German Catholic clergy was solidly but not aggressively conservative, the Slav impatiently nationalistic. Without the imposing personality of

¹ The unique exception from this vassalage were the Czechs who, under their Hussite traditions and fighting their Catholic aristocracy of a German origin allied with Vienna had a very cool attitude toward Rome which was returned with suspicion and distrust.

the Croatian bishop Strossmayer, without his continuous and strenuous effort for the cultural elevation and national enlightenment of his people, Jugo-Slav unity is almost unimaginable. Similarly the Slovenian Roman Catholic priest, Janez Krek, played an almost apostle-like rôle not only in the national field but also in the economic and social walks of his nation. Even in Hungary where the strongly nationalistic Magyar spirit checked to a large extent the international tendencies of the church, we find a series of Roman Catholic or Greek United priests who became the chief fighters for the claims of their national minorities and some of them even dared prison for their convictions (the Slovak priests Hlinka and Juriga).

The Slavophile tendency of the Roman church was so manifest that, in 1898, Prince Lichnowsky, when he replaced the German ambassador in Vienna, in one of his reports, drew the following characteristic picture of the national and moral situation of the dual monarchy before the German chancellor.

Outside of the clerical and feudal camp there are now few Germans in the Ostmark [How significant, that in the eyes of the Prussian diplomat Austria remained still the Ostmark, the eastern bulwark of the German empire!]. Without the companionship in arms of Mr. Wolf and his comrades [this group was in those times the most vehement exponent of the Austrian German nationalism, operating with an extreme nationalistic and anti-Semetic demagogy] Germandom would be hopelessly lost in face of the Slavs and their lay and clerical protectors.

Lichnowsky emphasized the fact that this conviction has an ascendancy also in the more moderate German circles and therefore the idea of an Austro-German unification would become inevitable to which only the court and the ecclesiastical circles are opposed. Then he continues in the following way:

By what could the national state idea of the Czechs, so full of strength, be counteracted if not by another national ideal? The entirely bloodless Austrian state-idea represented only by a pitiful old man and his unruly nephew and by a Roman Slav clergy does not suffice in any case. . . .²

The picture, however, drawn here by the German diplomat, was at that time too exaggerated and biased by a Pan-German point of view. The truth is that the militant Pan-German nationalism under the leadership of the talented Georg von Schönerer, was never capable of obtaining more serious results. At the end of the last century, terrified by the growing influence of the Czechs and, as a reaction against the Slavophile policy of Badeni, the German nationalists initiated the so-called *Los von Rom* ("away from Rome") movement by which Austrian Germans were invited to abandon Catholicism and to adhere to

² *Die grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914*. Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes (Berlin, 1924), XIII, 118-19.

Protestantism. That was intended as a demonstration against the Slavophile tendencies of the Catholic church and at the same time some manifestation of sympathy toward the Protestants of the German empire. But it was an open secret that the movement had in its ultimate resort an anti-Habsburg character. If the nine million Austrian-German Catholics should become Protestants, then Germany would have no further apprehension against the admission of Austria to Germany. In this manner the propaganda for *Los von Rom* assumed more and more the character of a *Los von Habsburg* but, in spite of the extreme demagoguery with which it was carried on, it was incapable of capturing the greater masses of population. During a whole decade only 60,000 to 70,000 men abandoned Catholicism and became Protestant or partly so-called Old Catholics (a sect which severed its connection with Rome).

Of a far greater importance was another mass movement of a religious character which utilized the social discontent of the German small bourgeoisie and which, by means of strongly dynastical and Greater Austrian slogans, was really successful in pushing back German separatism and in fructifying its anti-Semitic tendency in quite another direction. The real soul of this movement in the eighties of the last century was Karl Lueger, the later Viennese Mayor, who combined skilfully his enthusiastic Catholicism with the interests of the dynasty and of a so-called Christian Socialism, the edge of which was mainly directed against the Jewish better middle classes the financial and political preponderance of which pressed heavily on the working-people and small bourgeoisie of the bigger cities, especially of Vienna. Lueger and his comrades succeeded, to a large extent, by maneuvering cleverly with the anti-capitalism and anti-Semitism of the masses, in creating a loyal German dynastical movement on a Catholic basis, which became the most solid bulwark of all the efforts for a united monarchy and from which was recruited the most reliable and capable staff of Archduke Francis Ferdinand when he endeavored to rebuild the monarchy on the basis of the *Gesamtmonarchie* ("United monarchy"). The movement of Lueger encountered at the beginning the vehement attacks both of the so-called liberals and of the official clericals. The former hated the anti-Semitism of the Christian Socialists and their endeavors to replace private capitalism in the field of public utilities by municipal ownership. The latter, in its feudal and courtly atmosphere, was terrified by the effort of Lueger to make the social discontent of the masses conscious and to organize it. The fear and hatred against the new Catholicism of Lueger was so great that though the people of Vienna elected him four times as mayor, the Emperor refused to give his sanction to the election. But Lueger succeeded in destroying both fronts fighting against him: Austrian liberalism and orthodox Catholicism. Christian Socialism became, both in

parliament and in municipal life, a leading factor which always forcefully emphasized the unity of the state and of the army. And though the party in consequence of its closer co-operation with the popular masses was forced occasionally to play more nationalistic tunes, nevertheless, it was characterized by a certain supra-national attitude and Lueger tried to avoid national controversies in his camp. The words which he uttered on one occasion: "*Lasst's mir meine Böhm' in Ruh*" ("Leave me my Czechs in peace"), expressed with the force of a slogan his attitude toward the problem of nationality.

In spite of this with the growing national differentiation among the peoples of the monarchy, the unity of clericalism also became imperiled. It became more and more impossible that German clericalism should play the rôle of an appendix of the feudal and Slav coalition. It is characteristic that in 1909 the great Austrian-Catholic convention could not take place because the leaders of the clerical parties in the various countries felt themselves not sufficiently sure of keeping national controversies out of their discussions. But in 1912 the Viennese Eucharistic Congress became a real apotheosis of the Emperor and of the dynasty.

On the other hand the imperial house, too, remained loyal to its reliable spiritual bodyguard until the end. Everyone could assert that the more the national decomposition of the monarchy progressed, the more the sentiments of the dynasty became intense toward its Church. After the short-lived anti-clerical episode in both states of the monarchy, we witnessed a revival of clericalism, its more efficacious organization, and a systematic checking of all freer manifestations in public education and in social life. If Francis Ferdinand had reached the throne, this tendency would surely have culminated in the atmosphere of his highly bigoted wife.

The picture which I drew on previous pages of the force and tactical position of Catholicism applies chiefly to Austria. The religious situation in Hungary was somewhat diverse. That was the consequence in the first place of the difference in the numerical forces of Catholicism in the two countries. In Austria there was an overwhelming Catholic majority of 78.8 per cent which reached the total of 90.8 per cent by including the Greek Catholics. The Greek Oriental church constituted only 2.3 per cent of the population, whereas the Protestants did not reach even this figure (2.1 per cent). The Jews, with a total of 1,300,000 (4.6 per cent), lived far too remote from Christian society to influence its general religious texture. In Hungary proper, on the other hand, the Roman Catholic church constituted only a minority of 49.3 per cent which became only a majority of 60.3 per cent by including the Greek Catholics. This Greek Catholic element, however (mostly Rumanians and Ruthenians), at least in its bulk, constituted a distinct national entity which could not be

regarded as a firm pillar of the Roman church. The monopolistic position of the Roman Catholic church was further counterbalanced by the fact that the Counter-Reformation was not as entirely successful in Hungary as in Austria and a Protestant minority of 21.4 per cent (14.3 per cent of them Calvinists of a purely Magyar stock) had a great influence both in political and social life and represented a freer and more liberal current of opinion. At the same time a considerable minority of Greek Orthodox, 12.8 per cent, mostly Rumanians, formed a world the ideology and aspiration of which were neither in contact nor harmony with the ruling Catholicism. Finally a Jewish minority of 5 per cent was a very active element in all the intellectual spheres of Hungarian society.

In spite of these differences in the religious surroundings the Hungarian upper clergy of the Roman church was in its great majority a no less obedient instrument of the dynasty than in Austria. Every attack of the Viennese central authority and absolutism against Hungarian independence, and every plan for the creation of a joint state was always supported by the majority of the higher clergy and the loyalty of the church toward the throne remained always exceedingly emphasized and declamatory. The maxim: "God, King, and Fatherland" continued to be a symbolical expression of its attitude in this characteristic sequence. It must, however, be emphasized that after the compromise of 1867 when a distinct Hungarian state was acknowledged by the Emperor and when the government of the Hungarian state came under the exclusive control of the Magyar upper classes, the Catholic church also assumed more and more the Magyar colors. Some of the prelates were animated by true patriotic sentiments, others were making necessary concessions to the growing tide of Hungarian nationalism and chauvinism. Taking it as a whole, the Hungarian Catholic church remained far more feudal and imbued with class spirit than the Austrian. The cause of this phenomenon lay in the fact that the greatest masses of the Hungarian population had no political rights at all and, therefore, the Catholic church had the same aristocratic and anti-democratic spirit as the Austrian church had before the constitution of a modern Christian Socialist party. The Hungarian church was not only the chief pillar of the dynasty but of Magyar feudalism too. The Catholic church did not feel the necessity, as it did in Austria, of becoming a protector of the oppressed national minorities though we here witnessed also isolated efforts in this direction. So for instance Count Ferdinand Zichy, a very influential Catholic magnate, and his group, under the sway of Christian Socialist principles, energetically defended the elementary rights of the Slovak people and some of the bishops in the Slovak territory (especially the very gifted Fischer-Colbrie) saw clearly that the policy of Magyarization would cause serious difficulties from the

point of view of the church. But these currents remained almost without influence, partly because of the feudal spirit of the church.

The factor, however, which made the religious atmosphere of Hungary so distinct from that of Austria was the existence of the powerful Protestant minority to which I just alluded. This minority, especially its Calvinistic branch, was so intimately interwoven with the most energetic part of the Magyar small and middle nobility and peasantry that it was regarded by public opinion as a specific "Magyar religion" and as such it was one of the most fruitful sources of the Hungarian efforts for independence. This Calvinistic spirit counteracted very efficaciously Habsburg clericalism because the Catholic church did not dare to oppose seriously the nationalistic and chauvinistic tendencies lest it should lose the sympathy of patriotic public opinion to the advantage of the Protestant religion.

CHAPTER VI

BUREAUCRACY

In its work for centralization and unification, there was a secular effort of the Habsburg dynasty to create everywhere in its empire an absolutely reliable and loyal bureaucracy entirely under the control of its will. This effort was totally successful in the Austrian half of the monarchy, nay even in Hungary under the Germanizing centralization of the Bach system, absolutism was already very near to accomplishing the task of uniting the whole empire under the sway of a German administrative staff.

This administration, I repeat, was the most personal work of the Habsburg dynasty and aimed to eliminate all national particularism and all serious local autonomy. If the army could be called the military bodyguard of the Habsburgs and the Catholic church its spiritual bodyguard, then, the bureaucracy played the rôle of an official and police bodyguard. In the atmosphere of the *ancien régime* so full of feudal intrigues, treasons, and local interests, it was not an easy task to establish such a reliable bureaucracy and, therefore, the dynasty as a matter of fact employed by preference foreigners, very often adventurers, who sought for bread and glory in the imperial service. This historical structure of the older Austrian bureaucracy was pictured in a vivid manner by Hermann Bahr the able critic whose little book *Wien*, published in 1907, already mentioned, was immediately confiscated by the Viennese police. His most characteristic description is the following:

It became urgent to discover creatures into whom the semblance of a living force could only be blown by the breath of the imperial grace and which could be extinguished whenever wished. People nowhere at home, without fatherland, rooted nowhere, yesterday nobody but suddenly lifted up by an unseen hand, suspended in the air, as it were, in constant fear, almost on the gallows of the imperial grace. Runaways, vagrants, outcasts, forlorns, stablemen, adventurers, alchemists, astrologists, bastards, fortune-hunters, lackeys, penmen, and outlawed fugitive folks of the streets, unbound, nowhere adjusted to a social structure, everywhere at home where they had a chance to be fed. . . . And they know always that they may be hanged tomorrow. . . . Out of such people emanate the new races. And here was also a new colony, the colony of the imperial house. Here originated, too, a new race, the "patriots for me" of Emperor Francis. . . . They were artificial in their thoughts and sentiments, nay even in their language. A special Austrian-German was invented, an idiom still used in our administration and by Jews who do not wish to be Jews. They