

THE THREE-FOLD FUNCTION OF RELIGIOUS BODIES

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The first function here contemplated is that of rendering comparatively immediate social service. The second is that of providing organized blocks in a democracy to prevent sudden hysteria. The third is to afford orientation to human experience.

The first service is relatively simple. It consists in giving relief to indigent individuals and families, occasionally supplying professional advice or merely unprofessional encouragement, also sponsoring and offering a place and equipment for games, dances, theatricals, boy-scout activities and the like. The only comment that needs to be made on such functions is that they may not be sufficiently well thought through—a family may receive 12 baskets for Thanksgiving, 20 for Christmas and then be left to its own devices for the rest of the year. But, even at that, in a community where there are no professional social workers the religious bodies may be the only resource.

The second function is somewhat more difficult to explain. Democracy without private organization within it is likely to be swept off its feet by every wind of doctrine or of demagogery. Religious bodies provide resistant organized masses to hold the people back from precipitate action. They have dogmas and traditions, comradeship among the members, and a common hope that give them stability and power. Even though what they advocate may not always be right their opposition gives the electorate time to think.

De Toqueville emphasized the need of religious, moral and literary associations to supply the social structure which was thrown away when feudalism and kingship were discarded. Harold Laski stresses in his *Problems of Sovereignty* the principle that every organized group, be it church, labor union, or commercial association, has a little of what is known as sovereignty and emphasizes the function of such subordinate entities. In calling attention to the place of religious bodies in a democracy we are referring to the same principle.

It is well known that the most effective opposition to the totalitarian regime in Germany has been the Protestant and Catholic churches. They have had prestige, long tradition, profound loyalty, and in many minds, a hold on eternal life. This deep rootage has enabled them to put up effective opposition. If there should ever be a serious threat of totalitarianism in America these organizations would come into play. Even the bodies subordinate to the more extensive religious organizations, namely, the colleges, hospitals, welfare groups and the like, would furnish nuclei of opposition. Such bodies might well be encouraged in anticipation of such events.

But the third function, that of affording spiritual orientation, is the most important. Without that the other two would fail. The one undeniable value is personality. Let that be obscured and the whole world of values collapses to the status of matter. No longer is welfare activity directed to any end. No longer does democracy have any distinctive organ-

ization. On the desirability of maintaining and promoting personality all free society is predicated. Religious bodies insist distinctively on this orientation. God as a person is a symbol of this emphasis, and the same can be said of the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mother, and the Saints.

Religious bodies should be protected and promoted as part of our support of Western civilization. This is the significance of the inclusion of freedom of worship in our Bill of Rights.