Introduction

No one today would still talk about Church and state as two institutions, or concepts, which common sense or history have conclusively taught us to distinguish. We are better equipped now than at the beginning of the twentieth century to appreciate the connections and interrelations that would be concealed by too rigid a division between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the temporal, clergy and laity. The political rituals and imagery of the most republican past now seem to us loaded with religious significance or nostalgia. Ethnology teaches that any actual power only becomes rightful power by being sacralised, most of all royal power, source of all other, whose every manifestation is a theophany. From sacredness to priesthood is only a small step. The Indo-European vocabulary and myths tell us that the king rules not only relations between humans but relations between humankind and the gods,[1] and that the king synthesises in his person the warrior, priestly and productive functions.[2] Marc Bloch's *The Royal Touch* and Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*, two seminal works I mention here by way of dedication, have accustomed us to the idea that the Christian sovereigns, too, had *charismata*, and that they cannot simply be ranked as laity.

The state is sacred and the Church is power. If their separation constitutes an undeniable advance and deserves to be preserved as a moral principle and, above all, a guarantee of freedom, this is not a natural phenomenon but a legacy of history, and therefore problematic. Many are the human societies where there is no sign of this separation, thanks not to some alleged psychology of peoples – though the notion lingers in the subconscious – but to circumstances. Antiquity had its priests, but there was no pagan Church on the margins or at the heart of the state; in the case of Judaism and Islam, two religions of the Book where the

[1] E. Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, II (Paris, 1969), pp. 57–69.
[2] G. Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, II (Paris, 1971), p. 358; see also D. Dubuisson, 'Le roi indo-européen et la synthèse des trois fonctions', *Annales, Economies Sociétés Civilisations (ESC)*, 33 (1978), pp. 21–34; J. Le Goff, 'Les trois fonctions indo-européennes, l'historien et l'Europe féodale', *Annales, ESC*, 34 (1979), pp. 1187–1215.

message does not fundamentally differ from that of Christianity, the synchronism between religious revelation and political organisation is so total that the distinction between Church and state becomes almost meaningless. In utopian or supposedly ideal societies this same duality is always denied or abolished; all fundamentalism seeks to establish a Church state and all totalitarian ideology a state Church. In the case of Christianity, too, we have to allow for the influence of history. When he uttered the famous words: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew, 22: 21), Christ was in the somewhat contradictory historical situation of a Jew obliged to live his monotheism in a polytheistic empire. Later, it was the geographical break up of Roman power that favoured the emergence of a 'theory of the two powers', one temporal and established in Constantinople, the other spiritual and remaining in Rome. But as soon as an eastern Church was organised round the emperor and his patriarch, or the empire was reborn in the West with the Carolingians and the Ottonians, the schema ran into difficulties and the theory of the two powers was confronted by another theory, or rather by another model: that of an earthly monarchy conceived in the image of divine monarchy, incarnated in a sovereign to whom God had directly delegated the government and the salvation of men, and whom he had legitimated by unction. The separation of powers was resisted not so much by fundamentalism as by a nostalgia for unity.

Was this emperor, or this king (we should remember that *basileus* may be translated by either word), in his own way, a priest? The question is usually posed only at the conclusion of a systematic analysis of the legitimate or illegitimate interventions of the temporal power in the Church, with the claim to priesthood representing the extreme and shocking degree of unbridled autocracy. It seemed to me, on the contrary, that it was better to begin with this problem and as far as possible confine myself to it. It indicates the most difficult, but also the most direct and most reliable, way of evaluating links between the political and the religious. Rather than drawing up an endless and groundless inventory of the emperor's rights in ecclesiastical matters, which postulates a distinction, let us take advantage of the exceptionally rich documentation provided by Byzantium to examine the many resonances of the concept of king-priest, postulating a unity.

The Church–state opposition and its derivatives, incautiously applied to the Christian middle ages, have led to no end of confusion, anachronism and error. To speculate about an equilibrium between the spiritual and the temporal is to adopt a shortsighted or self-deluding approach; it is to think in institutional rather than power terms, to presume an implicit constitution and a near consensus about principles, and to accept the existence of tensions and contraventions and a gulf between theory and practice, but not to see them as questioning a conventional separation of roles. One may understand in this way the domain

of municipal magistrates or imperial functionaries, who had a power of representation or of delegation and were themselves only cogs in a wheel; but the language can no longer be the same when one approaches the top of the hierarchy, the emperor who governs or the hierarch who 'binds and looses'. The notion of institution is then replaced by that of power, a tactic of separation by a strategy of unity. Power, unlike institutions, carries its own justification; it does not make it possible to establish the traditional difference between the person and the function, but only to see in the same person what might be called, using the vocabulary of Christology, 'two natures' or, using the political vocabulary of the England of 1600, 'two bodies'.

The real question is whether the emperor was or was not, in his own way, a priest. It cannot be avoided, but, in the Christian context, a positive response is tainted with doctrinal error. For the most part, one finds only anecdotal or rhetorical allusions accompanied by a disclaimer. Constantine the Great called himself 'a bishop over the outside', but this was only a manner of speaking; it was rumoured that Herakleios, victorious over Persia, had become a priest,[3] but the story lacked all foundation; Leo III declared: 'I am emperor and priest', but he was a heretic; Leo VI held the rank of lector or deacon, but only according to Arab writers seeking to explain why his remarriage had been prohibited. The priesthood of kings seems to be an obvious truth to which any reflection on the foundations of a universal monarchy leads, but which cannot be expressed openly without being condemned, and which must be camouflaged by anodyne comparisons. Both the fact and the camouflage probably date back to Constantine the Great, that is, to the very beginnings of an empire which was suddenly identified with Christianity present and future, whose history was from then on measured by the yardstick of Christian time – a sort of countdown bringing the eschatological climax daily a little closer – and whose ruler became the manager of an economy of salvation. This emperor with a mission to convert and to fulfil the prophecies had then to be recognised as possessing the special priesthood, outside the strictly liturgical domain, which had been that of the mysterious Melchizedek of Genesis, or of Saul, David and Solomon, predecessors of the *basileis* at the head of a chosen people.

Everything turns on this, less in the coherence of the ideas than in the superimposing of models. Among the latter, for cultural reasons which mask deep-seated prejudices, historiography has always favoured those that derive from antiquity. As a result, with regard to the problem which is our concern here, it has too exclusively evoked the sacredness of the Hellenistic kings and attached exaggerated importance to the rather anodyne title of *pontifex maximus* borne by the pagan emperors, leading to the simplistic conclusion that the empire of Constantine and his successors had been only imperfectly Christianised.

[3] CSCO, Scriptores Syri III, 4, *Chronica minora*, ed. I. Guidi, I, p. 24.

In actual fact, the Old Testament was far more influential than antiquity. I hope to show this by suggesting that the transition to Christianity had as much impact in the political as in the religious sphere, in a way that was almost equally visible but rather more problematic. This influence was particularly marked and decisive in the East, because of the presence there of Jerusalem, and because it was in the East that the most highly structured and enterprising Jewish communities were found and that it was hardest to forget the Judaic roots of the other 'religions of the Book' – even if this forgetfulness was sometimes more deliberate than elsewhere, for example at the time of the 'orthodox' reaction against an iconoclasm accused of Judaising. In good sacred history, the emperors of Christian Byzantium inherited from the Old Testament kings a power not only sacred and divine, which was already the case with Hellenistic and Roman power, but priestly or quasi-priestly. It was this that gave substance to the very notion of a Christian empire, but also made it ambiguous; for Christianity no longer permitted a realistic reading of the history of the Jewish people, their kings and their relations with their jealous God, but only a metaphorical one. When the age of Law was succeeded by the age of Grace, the Old Testament lost all historical reality to become only the projection of a future to be decoded, a repertoire of situations and behaviour which could no longer serve as a basis for any legitimacy. These rather transparent views gave a precise but disembodied and slightly deceptive image of the *basileia*. Between the emperors of Constantinople, who saw themselves in the mirror of the Old Testament, and the Christian Church of which they formed part, there existed a gulf which is revealed by the ceremonial that took the sovereigns from their palace to St Sophia. The debate which resulted belonged to exegesis and not to ideology, and formed part of the more general contradiction in which Christianity was both the continuation and the abolition of Judaism. It endlessly revolved round the insoluble problem of the king-priest, but rarely tackled it head on. It was muted, but periodically revived by an extreme sensibility to certain words, images and gestures. The inevitable but inadmissible notion of royal priesthood clung on to a few texts or rituals, going deeper to ground as the refutations became stronger and the balance of power between the emperor and the ecclesiastical hierarchy evolved. It was both what could not be said and what it was impossible not to think. The denials were more numerous than the affirmations, and many historians have been taken in by this arithmetical imbalance.[4]

This, briefly summarised, is the central thesis which justifies the title of my book. But reliance on a specific documentation demands certain precautions and

[4] In particular L. Bréhier, the only historian to devote a brief study to this subject: 'Hiereus kai Basileus', in *Mémorial Louis Petit. Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie byzantines* (Bucharest, 1948), pp. 41–5.

respect for the reader imposes certain obligations. A knowledge of Byzantium cannot be assumed, even on the part of contemporary medievalists, for whom it is not a prime concern. I have therefore deliberately chosen a fairly wide-ranging approach and made each chapter to a degree independent, within a whole in which chronological order is important but not all-important.

I propose to approach the problem by three different routes. One, the most majestic but also the most encumbered, is that of the imperial succession. On this point, Byzantium had to battle with all its heritages, lacking a theory, conceiving an opposition between unction and blood and between the legitimacy of rupture and the legitimacy of continuity, and seeking above all to develop complex practices which would neutralise the dilemma. Priestly kingship was already an element in this ambiguity; it also existed, as has recently been shown, in the early medieval West,[5] though without producing the same results or raising the same issues. For any attempt to understand the meaning of the verb 'to succeed', the eastern *basileia* offers an incomparably richer panorama. But it is not enough on its own; it is also necessary to read the Old Testament and to observe what Islam took from it.

A second approach is through coronation, that is, the ritual in which one would expect to find, behind formulae, gestures and insignia, a definition of sacred kingship and of the sovereign's relations with God and with the Church. This is probably true of the West; in the East, however, the trail quickly runs dry, or rather leads off in another direction. It emerges that coronation was slow to be ritualised, and that the role of the clergy in it was kept to a minimum; it might assume many forms and remained almost the only event that really mattered, namely, the assumption of power, planned or sudden, peaceful or bloody. Coronation prolonged or mimed this, gave it the security of popular consensus and ecclesiastical blessing, but also preserved or restored to it its charge of violence, and recognised that direct link between the emperor and God which we have already noted and which was as good as priesthood.

It is a different ceremonial that takes us to the heart of the debate, one that was much more common; repeated at every major festival, it took the emperor from the heart of his palace to the gates of St Sophia, and from there into the interior of the sanctuary, which he entered in the company of the patriarch, just as Moses had entered the 'tabernacle of the congregation' with his brother Aaron. This procession, punctuated by halts and by the crossing of thresholds, demonstrates better than any constitution the limits and the true nature of imperial power, the proximity that united kings and priests and the distance that separated them, and the conditions and the mutations that were necessary before the Old Testament sovereign could acquire Christian legitimacy. Each stage of this highly

[5] A. W. Lewis, *Royal Succession in Capetian France: Studies on Familial Order and the State* (London, 1981).

organised scenario had attached to it, in the collective memory and imagination, a group of stories, legends and images which emphasised its meaning and served as a reminder that those participating in or watching the ceremony might at any moment step out of their preordained roles, break the rules and perform an act so dysfunctional as to create what was called a 'scandal'.

One cannot mix centuries with impunity and, to avoid the illusion of stability which Byzantine civilisation so easily creates in those who succumb to its fascination, it is at least necessary to focus on a number of points ranged over time, and show how permanence and change interact.

Some reference to Constantine was inevitable, if not without its dangers. A book would hardly have been long enough for a full discussion of the religious policy of the first Christian emperor, and this was not my aim. Instead, I have tried, on the basis of the rectifications rapidly made to his projects, speeches and the *Life* by Eusebios of Caesarea and of the development of legends which made him a saint without ever wholly eradicating an undertow of stubborn hostility, to bring out the ambiguities inherent in the very notion of a Christian empire. Every effort has been made to get rid of Constantine: by sterilising his ideas in a rhetoric of 'as if', by neutralising the man himself in sainthood and by finding in the legend of Pope Sylvester and the Roman baptism, the first step towards the *Constitutum Constantini*, a way of inverting the roles and of distancing an *imperium* and a *sacerdotium* which no one knew how to reconcile. Constantine was thus disposed of, but the great Constantinian themes remained, and it was from this source that the 'New Constantines' sprang, successors against whom the Church kept the doors of sainthood firmly shut.

It is not far from Constantine to Antichrist, as became clear in the age of iconoclasm (730–843), that crucial period in Byzantine history that revealed the depth of a schism which had long been open, and was never again wholly healed, between the imperial power and the Church. All the grievances accumulated against the Christian emperors erupted, and they were ranked among the persecutors or found to give off more than a whiff of sulphur. This was a spectacular process, carefully stage-managed and effectively dramatised. Reforming emperors were travestied as heretics; sovereigns imbued with their religious role were caught in the trap of exegesis. When the phrase 'Am I not emperor and priest?' was attributed to Leo III, a nerve was touched, the enigmatic figure of Melchizedek, who had haunted the imagination for centuries, was conjured up and a question was posed to which there could be no answer.

Iconoclasm marked a rupture. With it ended the great age of the emperor-priest; after it strategies of piety were developed which, by means of ceremonial, religious architecture and the distribution of holy relics and imperial insignia, defined what may be called a religion of the emperors. The dynastic policy of the first Macedonian emperors – Basil I (867–86), Leo VI (886–912) and

Constantine Porphyrogenitus (913–59) – may appear chaotic when studied through the events of their reigns, but makes perfect sense in the context of the world of sanctity, that invisible but nearby world where the only sure alliances were made. There was no more speculation about Melchizedek; that direct route towards the claim to priesthood, if not entirely closed, was definitively prohibited. Nor did the Christian sovereigns now attempt to define their place theoretically in an overall ecclesiology; this was done, and as restrictively as possible, by the hierarchs and this zone, too, had become a minefield. Their aim was now more modestly and more concretely to remodel the religious landscape, to impose a system on it and to trace in it a topography and itineraries that would restore to the emperors what they had lost in the unfortunate dispute of iconoclasm. The patriarchs, generally submissive and easily replaced if they were not, gave no real cause for concern; but the patriarchate as an institution had become a threat, and it was here that a sacred space had to be recaptured. The great works of the tenth century which, like the *Book of Ceremonies*, claimed to preserve from oblivion a venerable tradition, should rather be seen as books written for the occasion, which attempted, with some success, to establish a new equilibrium in this sphere.

The last three chapters will be devoted not to the emperors, since they were no longer the source of new ideas, but to the clergy, who, from iconoclasm on, organised, wrote, argued and sometimes sought to erect the patriarchate as counter-power. A much richer and more varied documentation provides a few 'constitutional' markers: in 806, a letter from Theodore of Stoudios to the emperor Nikephoros, which sketches the first portrait of an ideal and legitimately elected patriarch; in 879–80, the first canon of the 'Photian' council, which extended patriarchal jurisdiction over the whole of eastern Christianity; at the same period, the first three titles of the juridical collection of the *Eisagoge*, in which the temporal power and a spiritual power which aimed to eclipse it were placed in false symmetry; in the mid-eleventh century, the texts which described the 'schism' of the patriarch Michael Keroularios and his battles with the imperial power. A 'clerical' rather than 'royal' reading of the history of the Jewish people encouraged this theocratic dream; but it was above all Rome which, in spite of the disagreements and the ruptures between the patriarchate and the papacy, served as model. The legend of St Sylvester baptising Constantine as he left for Constantinople and his receipt of imperial privileges, known and accepted in the East, may have sown the seed of a 'royal priesthood' conceived as the opposite to a 'priestly kingship'. New Rome recalled that it had in principle the same rights as Old Rome, and the rare patriarchs who carried this notion to its logical conclusion set up as rivals, in the same capital, the 'two powers' whose geographical separation to the two poles of Christendom had been consecrated by the Sylvestrine legend.

I will look, lastly, at the canonists and liturgists, beginning with Balsamon. He was the first, at the end of the twelfth century, to pose the problem of the emperor's 'episcopal *charismata*', to consider not only the limits of his intervention in the Church but the nature of his power, and to marshal the arguments. The time was ripe for this lucidity, which has been seen primarily as subservience; the age of the Komnenoi saw the starkest contrast between an elite of Constantinopolitan clergy and an oligarchy of metropolitans. Writing as the thoughts came into his head, Balsamon noted some particularities which made it impossible to regard the emperor as simply a layman: he entered the sanctuary in order to present his gifts, and had the right to cense the faithful and instruct them. These hasty thoughts, endlessly repeated and expanded, culminated in a theory with unction as its keystone, an 'Old Testament' unction that was all the more effective in that it was symbolic and that the sovereign received it without priestly intermediary. It conferred on him 'priestly *charismata*'. After 1204, this hypothesis collapsed. Royal unction was soon no more than a 'sacramental', as in the West; a vague symbolism invaded the ceremonial, cut it off from its roots, and avoided recognising the Davidic references. The Byzantine emperor was no more than a layman on whom was conferred only a purely formal grade of half-cleric, as with the kings studied by Marc Bloch.

This book would perhaps not be wholly without value if it did no more than add an eastern dimension to the works of western medievalists devoted to the same subject. But it has another aim. I hope to show that it was in Byzantium that were forged, tried out and appraised most of the formulae that were later re-used in the medieval and modern West, where they had neither the same depth of meaning nor, above all, the same justification. I hope, in particular, to expose the mechanisms of a historiography which describes a Christian world divided from the beginning into two cultural zones, one western, where the temporal and spiritual 'powers' were differentiated, the other eastern, where they were combined. This will be the subject of my last chapter. It begins with an analysis of the notion of 'caesaropapism', which was meant to stigmatise a typically Byzantine perversion of the relations between state and Church, but which can easily be shown to have been a product of the most contradictory religious movements of modern Europe. Nor is the 'theory of the two powers', which is contrasted with imperial interventionism, perhaps as simple or as clear as is claimed. It is a product of a mixture of warring elements and superposes the Christian distinction between the spiritual and the temporal, the functional separation between the affairs of the Church and those of the state, and the political recognition of a clerical power independent of lay power. Here, too, western Europe seeks to distance itself from the East and projects on to the writings and age of Pope Gelasius I (492–6), elevated to theoretician, a political

Augustinianism which long served it as a doctrine in a context of historical rupture and the fragmentation of power.

In Byzantium, where the illusion of continuity prevailed, the same problems had a different resonance. They started with the birth of a Christian empire and made it impossible to conceive of a Christianity where the *imperium* and the *sacerdotium* were independent of each other; they remained linked to a timescale and an ecclesiology which had as its keystone the emperor, from David to the age of Grace, then from the First to the Second Coming. Alongside the Church, for which the patriarchs and the metropolitans alone were responsible, there was this sacred history, which was perceived through the succession of the emperor-priests.

Power, it is true, changed its nature with the Incarnation. But are we to believe that Christ definitively separated the temporal and the spiritual power which had previously been merged or, on the contrary, that He finally united for the last stage in human history the priesthood of Levi and the kingship of Judah?

In one of the early chapters of *The Brothers Karamazov*, that most Byzantine of novels, Dostoevsky expresses our problem in the form of a paradox. Ivan Karamazov, revolutionary intellectual and atheist, has written a treatise on the ecclesiastical courts, in which he rejects the principle of the separation of Church and state. He is questioned on this subject by companions who between them express a whole spectrum of opinions: Miusov, another layman, a landowner, westernising and sceptical; Father Paissy, representative of Orthodoxy; and the Elder, who speaks the language of the heart. Ivan justifies his position by explaining that the confusion between Church and state, however unacceptable, will always exist, because normal relations between the two are impossible and because 'its very basis is false'. But, instead of asking what should be the place of the Church in the state, one should rather ask how the Church will be identified with the state to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. When the Roman empire became Christian, it naturally incorporated the Church, but the latter, so as not to renege on its principles, cannot but seek in its turn to control the state.

Miusov observes that this is a utopian dream and hardly serious, 'something like socialism, I suppose'. The Elder hesitates for another reason; he fears that, in a world where the law and love are merged, the criminal will no longer deserve pity, as he no longer deserves it – or so the Elder believes – in 'Lutheran countries' and in Rome, where the Church has proclaimed itself state. But he foresees nevertheless a far-off day when the Church will reign:

> 'But, good Lord,' cried Miusov, as though suddenly losing his self-control completely, 'what are you talking about? The State is to be abolished on earth and the Church is to be raised to the position of the State! Why, it's no longer

> Ultramontanism, it's arch-Ultramontanism! It's more than Pope Gregory the Seventh dreamed of!'
>
> 'You've got it all wrong, sir', Father Paissy said severely. 'It is not the Church that is to be transformed into the State. Please understand that. That is Rome and its dream, that is the third temptation of the devil. On the contrary, the State is transformed into the Church, it rises to it and becomes a Church all over the world, which is the complete opposite of Ultramontanism and Rome and your interpretation of it, and is only the great predetermined destiny of the Orthodox Church on earth. This star will shine in the East!'[6]

This is how the issue was being debated in the Russia of the 1870s, with some confusion of theocracy and caesaropapism. There may have been forebodings about the ideological drift of a state–Church, but this was seen, all in all, as closer to the spirit of Orthodoxy than the spiritual treason of a Church–state. The only point quickly accepted was that a distinction in principle between the two powers rested on a lie. But what was that lie?

[6] F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London, 1958), pp. 73–4.