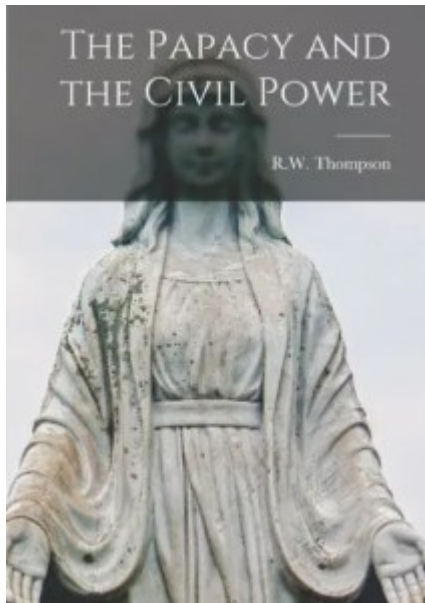


The Papacy And The Civil Power – R. W. Thompson



The author Richard Wigginton Thompson (June 9, 1809 – February 9, 1900) was an American politician. He was appointed by President Rutherford B. Hayes the 27th United States Secretary of the Navy and served in that office from March 13, 1877 to December 20, 1880. He also wrote [*Footprints of the Jesuits*](#) which is on this website.

THE PAPACY
AND
THE CIVIL POWER.
BY
R. W. THOMPSON.

“Popery is a double thing to deal with, and claims a twofold power, ecclesiastical and political, both usurped, and the one supporting the other.” JOHN MILTON.

“There was no usurpation so great as that of the Romans, who usurped the Empire ; neither do I exempt from this rule the priesthood, whose violence is double, inasmuch as it is doubled in holding men under corporeal and under spiritual authority.” FRANCIS GUICCIABDINI.

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PREFACE.

IT has seemed to me, for a long time, that it was the duty of the people of the United States to make themselves familiar with the history of the papacy, its relations to the civil power, and its attempted encroachments upon the rights of existing governments. This conviction caused me to enter upon the investigations which have resulted in the preparation of this volume mainly for self-edification ; and if the conclusions I have reached are not satisfactory to others, I shall be content if they are stimulated to make like investigations for themselves.

Having begun and prosecuted my labors from the Protestant stand-point, I am aware that the partisan defenders of the papacy and its enormous pretensions will assign every thing I have stated, whether of fact or opinion, to the force of habit and prejudice of education. This prejudice is undoubtedly strong in all minds ; and, struggle against them as we may, we are all apt to be influenced, more or less, by the current opinions prevailing among those with whom we habitually associate. But as I have not undertaken to discuss mere points of religious doctrine, or to treat of the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, except in so far as they have been employed to influence the civil policy and action of governments, I am unwilling to concede myself less able to discover and declare the truth in reference to them than is a Roman Catholic to understand and describe the true character and tendencies of Protestantism.

In the claim of impartiality and fairness in all such matters, the advantage is on the side of the Protestant. Roman Catholic writers are led, almost universally, by the very nature of their church organization, into intolerance and dogmatism. They are always ready to assume, without investigation or inquiry, that whatsoever the papacy has done or taught from the beginning is unerringly right and truth. They do not employ their individual reason or judgment to examine for themselves, but are content to accept whatsoever is announced by ecclesiastical authority. Since the recent decree of the pope's infallibility, this authority is all centered in him. He is made incapable of error in all that he has declared, or shall hereafter declare, in the domain of faith and morals; and every member of the Church wins equal infallibility for himself only by the acceptance and promulgation of this doctrine.

Not so with the Protestant. He appeals to reason; examines history for himself; weighs both evidence and argument; and exercises his own intelligent judgment in separating right from wrong, truth from falsehood. While the papacy demands implicit and passive obedience the entire submission of the whole man, by the sacrifice of all his sense of personality, Protestantism encourages and develops this sense by treating every individual as endowed with the faculty of reason, and as possessing the right to employ it for himself. Manifestly, he who does not do it is mere "clay in the hands of the potter."

I have endeavored to obtain the information upon which my conclusions are based, without concerning myself about matters of religious faith, any further than as I have found religion and politics mixed up together; and then only to the extent of ascertaining **how far the world has been influenced by the union of Church and State**, and what the probable effect upon mankind would be if that union should again become general and universal. My toleration toward even the most violent and vindictive assailants of Protestantism is such as forbids that I should challenge the integrity of their motives, or the sincerity of their convictions. I will not quarrel with them about their religious opinions. These are to be judged of by an Authority far higher than any earthly tribunal at the final bar, where we shall all meet and by a Judge to whose sentence, whether of approval or condemnation, every one of us must submit. It is far more agreeable to me to concede, as I readily and cheerfully do, that there is much in the antiquity and history of the Roman Catholic Church to enlist our admiration – much that has benefited the world by the dissemination of good and benignant influences. But if I have found in Protestantism, as it exists in the United States under the shelter of our popular institutions, that which has disseminated these same influences in a far greater degree; that which has done more to improve, advance, and elevate the world ; and that which, on these accounts, is to be preferred, it will be found to be because papal imperialism, originating in worldly motives and founded upon temporal ambition, has led this grand old church, by means of an external ecclesiastical organization, far away from its original apostolic simplicity and purity.

Such are my habits of thought possibly from professional training that I have taken but little for granted; but, in order to exercise an intelligent judgment as far as possible, have examined and weighed all the evidence within my reach, as I would that bearing upon any controverted point about which I can have no personal information. It is no easy matter to separate the true from the false in history, either secular or ecclesiastical. It requires the most careful and searching examination of authorities, often in conflict with each other, and sometimes with themselves. **It is not safe to accept all that is recorded as true, or to reject it as false.** Nor should that degree of moral evidence which amounts to positive demonstration be required. **We should be satisfied with such proof as establishes the reasonable probability of any given statement of facts.** The degree of evidence necessary to establish a fact, is, in a great measure, influenced by the nature of the fact itself always involving the preliminary inquiry whether it is appropriate or inappropriate to it. Evidence is of but little value unless it satisfies the mind and conscience. A reasonable man will require nothing more, and should be satisfied with nothing less. The difficulties in relation to the rules of evidence are greater or less, according to the nature of our experience and observation of human affairs, and our comprehension of the motives of men and societies. **Our common sense is the best and safest guide**, because it is not likely to lead us into those obscure and difficult paths where men are so often and so unprofitably carried by mere scholastic learning, and from which they can not extricate themselves without the assistance of those who designedly conduct them there.

There are many things entitled to be recognized without proof. Every thing which partakes of the nature of a public act; general laws and customs; matters which concern a whole people, or the government of a country; and such things as would naturally happen in the ordinary course of events are all of this character. To reject these would be to remove all the foundations and landmarks of history.

It should not be forgotten that, in the investigation of events far removed from our own time, we are compelled to acquire information of them only through the perception of others, and not our own. In reference to such events, credulous minds are too apt to give implicit credit to whatsoever is recorded; incredulous minds, too apt to reject it. To avoid these extremes, we should keep our minds in an evenly balanced condition without inclining either to the side of belief or disbelief so that when all the evidence accessible to us shall be applied, we may allow the scale to preponderate on that side where the most reasonable probability lies; that is, where the result is consistent with the knowledge of facts already known to us.

These are recognized and well-established rules of evidence. They govern us in our ordinary intercourse with the world. And as they have guided me throughout my investigations, I have deemed it proper to state them, that others may understand the process of my reasoning, and be able to test the accuracy of my conclusions. These investigations having been prosecuted when all the circumstances connected with the present demands of the papacy are calculated to impress my mind with their magnitude and importance, I have endeavored to divest myself of all undue and improper prejudice, and to conduct them in the spirit of toleration and with all reasonable impartiality. I hope I have succeeded in this, because I have no wish to convey to the minds of others any belief or impressions except such as may meet the approval of their own reason and judgment. That I may have erred in admitting or rejecting evidence, in giving too great or too little weight to it when received, or may have reached improper and unwarrantable conclusions, is altogether probable; for, unlike the supporters of the papacy, I lay no claim to infallibility, or even to exemption from ordinary frailty. This is all I claim: that I have endeavored to be candid, and to state the convictions of my mind as inoffensively as possible; being content that others shall decide for themselves how far they are right and how far wrong.

During the celebrated controversy between Dr. Breckenridge and Archbishop Hughes, some years ago, the former had occasion to make a quotation from the catechism of the Council of Trent; and not having the original before him, took it from the works of Archbishop Usher, one of the most learned and extensively known of the English divines. Making no immediate question about the correctness of the quotation, Archbishop Hughes thus, in a seemingly supercilious (arrogant) air, evaded the matter: "Who this Usher is," said he, "I am at a loss to conjecture. There is an author of that name; but he does not possess much authority with Catholics, for the reason that he happens to be a *Protestant* archbishop." Illiberality of this kind is calculated rather to mislead and deceive than to discover the truth; and I have not suffered myself to be betrayed into it. I should be slow to conclude that a Roman Catholic writer is to be discredited merely on account of his

religious belief, or that what a Protestant says is to be accepted as unconditionally true merely because he is a Protestant.

At the, risk of swelling this volume to an undesirable size, I have made extended quotations from different authors, and from the bulls, encyclicals, etc., of the popes. This is deemed preferable to briefer extracts and condensed statements, because it furnishes the means of testing the fairness and accuracy both of criticisms and arguments. When I have found an author manifestly a mere partisan on either side, I have endeavored not to be biased by his influence. Cormenin, although not a Protestant, seems to me to be too sweeping in his denunciations of many of the popes, and therefore, has excited in my mind such suspicion of his impartiality that I have adopted his personal opinions in but few instances. Some of his pictures of the general corruption and depravity prevailing at Rome must be too highly colored. I know of no reason, however, why he should be any more discredited than other historians upon general questions of fact.

As my inquiries have been prosecuted in the midst of active business occupations, with the assistance of only a very limited and self-acquired knowledge of classical learning, and with no access to a single authority or volume beyond my own private library, this book is not designed for the instruction of the educated classes, who have the means of making like inquiries for themselves. It is intended for *the people*, who, in the main, are without these means, and who are the final arbiters upon all public questions. If their attention shall be arrested by it, and they shall be excited to additional diligence in guarding the civil and religious rights guaranteed to them by the Government of the United States, it will concern me very little to know that it has invited criticism, or that I, on account of it, have incurred the animosity and anathemas of such as pay for the protection our institutions give them by Jesuitical plottings to establish a "Holy Empire" upon their ruins.

R. W. T.

Continued in [The Papacy and Civil Power – Chapter I. Introductory](#)