

Doctrine of Caesaropapism

1. Caesaropapism is the concept of combining the power of secular government with, or making it supreme to, the spiritual authority of the Christian Church; most especially, the interpenetration of the theological authority of the Christian Church with the legal / juridical authority of the government; in its extreme form, it is a political theory in which the head of state, notably the Emperor ('Caesar', by extension an 'equal' King), is also the supreme head of the church ('papa', pope or analogous religious leader).
2. The first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine, showed some inclination towards Caesaropapism.
3. It is recorded that, having had before the Battle of Milvian Bridge on Oct 28, 312 AD a vision of a labarum (ensign) with the message "*by this sign you shall conquer*", once victorious Constantine presented himself to the Bishop of Rome, and offered gifts of thanksgiving in the form of clemency and tolerance, although later claims of land based upon a Donation of Constantine were proved to be a forgery in the 15th century.
4. Yet Emperor Constantine declined baptism until he was on his death bed. He also viewed himself as the overseer / bishop (the word "bishop" comes from the Greek *episkopos* "overseer") of external relations of the Christian Church.
5. He decreed that the bishops gather at the First Ecumenical Council in 325 AD in Nicea in Bithynia which is now present-day Turkey.
6. The assertion of imperial power over the fathers (*papa*) of the church by the rulers/emperors or Caesars was opposed by Ambrose of Milan, Italy (b. between 337 and 340 - d. 4 April, 397), and by many bishops, especially those of Rome, and some others.
7. While in the West the collapse of the secular Roman institutions during the flood of mainly Germanic invasions allowed the church to rise to a higher socio-political power, even transferring formal political power to princes of the church, and the papacy aspired an emperor-like supremacy over the secular princes, in the Byzantine empire the church (which ended up separated from the Roman papacy and theologically distinct from its Catholic teachings under the name of Orthodoxy) was practically made a branch of the Emperor's control of society at large; bishops were even ordered to collect taxes for the state; Caesaropapism may have been the reason that millennialism was condemned, but this is vigorously disputed.
8. When Peter the Great, the last nominal Tsar of All Russia, transformed his vast empire along more Western lines against all opposition (as from conservative clergy) he decided that in the 'third Rome' (Russia was seen as the heir to Constantinople after the Ottoman conquest) the Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate could no longer remain a potential rival (at other times it had been the Crown's ally) and thus first suspended it, leaving it vacant for over twenty years, then replaced it with a Holy Synod entirely under his control in 1700. after which the church was submitted to Russia's consecutive tsarist and then communist regimes

9. The term is just as applicable to similar reports between secular and religious power when the titles of one or both office holders are different, and even at a smaller scale than the universal church, and is even used when the control is less than total.
10. Thus the French kings are a good example of a non-imperial Catholic monarchy that was rather successful in getting a great say in the French church (such as commendatory prelatures) and getting access to significant income from church property; during and around the 'Babylonian Exile' of the papacy in Avignon, France they even had a heavy hand in the papacy as such; and aspects of Gallicanism reflect the desire to give even the liturgy (even when Latin was the only language for church rites) a distinctive French flavour.
11. After the introduction of Protestantism, the immense fermentation caused by the introduction of socially subversive principles into the life of a people would exhaust its revolutionary beginnings, and result in a new form of social and religious order - the residue of the great Protestant upheaval in Europe was territorial or State Religion, based on the religious supremacy of the temporal ruler, in contradistinction to the old order in which the temporal ruler took an oath of obedience to the Catholic Church.
12. Martin Luther's first reformatory attempts were radically democratic. He sought to benefit the people at large by curtailing the powers of both Church and State. \
13. The German princes, to him, were *"usually the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth"*.
14. In 1523 he wrote: *"The people will not, cannot, shall not endure your tyranny and oppression any longer. The world is not now what it was formerly, when you could chase and drive the people like game"*.
15. This manifesto, addressed to the poorer masses, was taken up by Franz von Sickingen, a Knight of the Empire, who entered the field in execution of its threats. His object was twofold: to strengthen the political power of the knights — the inferior nobility — against the princes, and to open the road to the new Gospel by overthrowing the bishops, but his enterprise had the opposite result: the knights were beaten, lost what influence they had possessed, and the princes were proportionately strengthened.
16. The rising of the peasants likewise turned to the advantage of the princes: the fearful slaughter of Frankenhausen (1525) left the princes without an enemy and the new Gospel without its natural defenders.
17. The victorious princes used their augmented power entirely for their own advantage in opposition to the authority of the emperor and the freedom of the nation.