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'As loyal citizens.....'

The relationship between New Zealand Catholicism,
the State and Politics, 1945-1965.

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Abstract

This thesis has asked how both Church and state worked with one another across three areas of mutual concern, namely education, welfare and the anti-communist campaign. They were moderately successful. A combination of ecclesiology, ideology and pragmatism underpinned the interaction between the parties. Ordinary Catholics, like other Christians, were influenced by both secular and spiritual concerns, and there were a variety of viewpoints within the Church on those issues where the state was involved.

The relationship of church and state during the twenty years from 1945 to 1965, was both confrontational and highly supportive. Education had been the point of conflict since 1877, while the anti-communist activity sponsored by the Church actively supported successive governments in rebuffing communism. As the Welfare State expanded, there were differences as to how far the state should intrude into the lives of its citizens. Catholic social teaching was always wary of a slide into totalitarianism, but Church and state co-operated in the provision of a range of caring services whose cost effectiveness was helped by a low cost religious workforce. Such social services were needed for ordinary Catholics amidst the demands of modern living.

Until the reforms of Vatican II, the Church was principally concerned with itself and its people. Catholic separatism was accepted by the state as a condition for participation. By 1965 it was evident that reform would change the nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state. From the end of the Second World War until then, both the state and Church had to deal with a changing world: a rapidly expanding population; major changes to education; the slow dissolution of sectarian rivalry; the manner in which secularisation affected state sector policy and the increasing expectation that Christian values and viewpoint have a single unified voice. By 1965 these factors helped put the Catholic Church on a quite different relationship with the state than had been the case in 1945, although not one which saw a diminished role or influence.

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