

power and its limitation. The idea of a "natural justice," derived from man's proper use of his capacity for rational thought, became the basis for the idea of Natural Law, based upon the idea of a Supreme Lawgiver, a Lawgiver whose perfect intelligence was reflected in man's capacity for thought: God. Thus developed the Natural Law philosophy of the Stoics and Cicero. The idea of Natural Law, of a fixed code of right and wrong binding upon ruler and ruled alike, placed power in a new perspective, since it limited the exercise of power by placing God's will above man's will. References to this concept of Natural Law fill Roman philosophy. Probably no more influential advocate of the doctrine could be found than the Roman lawyer, Cicero, writing in *De Republica*:

Right reason is indeed a true law which is in accordance with nature, applies to all men, and is unchangeable and eternal. By its commands this law summons men to the performance of their duties; by its prohibition it restrains them from doing wrong. Its commands and prohibitions always influence good men, but are without effect upon the bad. To invalidate this law by human legislation is never morally right, nor is it permissible ever to restrict its operation, and to annul it wholly is impossible. Neither the senate nor the peo-

ple can absolve us from our obligation to obey this law . . . It will not lay down one rule at Rome and another at Athens, nor will it be one rule today and another tomorrow. But there will be one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples; and there will be, as it were, one common master and ruler of men, namely God, who is the author of this law, its interpreter, and its sponsor. The man who will not obey it will abandon his better self, and, in denying the true nature of man, will thereby suffer the severest of penalties, though he has escaped all the other consequences which men call punishment.

The Romans were told, "Because you bear yourself as less than the gods, you rule the world." Thus, as the heyday of Roman prosperity and success illuminated the ancient world, the Romans came to understand that through obedience to a higher power they had achieved power. Had a Roman chosen to speculate upon this point, he might have marveled that Rome grew powerful and prosperous while it recognized a power above that of the state, declining only when the power of the state, personified in the emperor, came to be viewed as unlimited and even divine. In both its success and its ultimate failure, Rome added another dimension to man's understanding of power.

The Romans were told, "Because you bear yourself as less than the gods, you rule the world."

Christianity

While the pagan world had been advancing in its understanding of power and its limitation, the Judeo-Christian heritage was also in process of formation. As the trials of the Hebrew nation as chronicled in the Old Testament had unfolded, certain patterns of thinking had emerged. Foremost among these was the doctrine of a higher law, centering on the principle that all political authorities were to be judged and limited in accordance with a code not relative to man and his affairs.

This was a doctrine implicit in Christianity from the beginning. The Church Fathers early recognized the perils of power, not only to the ruled, but to the ruler as well. In the words of St. Ambrose, "A wise man, though he be a slave, is at liberty, and from this it follows that though a fool rule, he is in slavery." The measure of wisdom or foolishness described here referred to man's capacity for understanding and living in conformity to a higher, God-given morality transcending the earthly exercise of power.

Unlike the Greeks, who had seen

the state as the central feature of society and a part of the "natural" order, the early Christians saw the state as an institution in and of the sinful world. While the state was needed to exercise power to protect men from other men in this flawed world, the Christian saw the state itself as a flawed, and therefore potentially dangerous, wielder of power. Christians in the early Church did not concern themselves over much with politics as such, so they developed no clear distinction between the legitimate and the illegitimate state. But they did make explicit what had already been implicit in the Roman Natural Law philosophy: God and not man was the final arbiter of justice, thus limiting *any* man's exercise of power.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Greek "natural justice" thus merged with Roman and Christian Natural Law to emphasize that the state was man's tool rather than his master. As the centuries passed by, the Christian idea of self-transcendence, of man's ability to rise above himself and above