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*Church and State in Lord Acton’s view  
(1834-1902)*

**PhD Thesis Summary**

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Key words:

Church, state, Roman-Catholicism, Council, Emancipation, liberalism, infallibility, temporal power, supremacy, papacy, Anglicanism.

This study makes a foray in the XIXth century, that is a historical period marked by a series of controversies occurred within the Roman-Catholic Church because of pope's Pius IX (1792-1878) desire to impose his authority in Church and State. The relationship between Church and State has always been a subject of intense debate especially because the two institutions have completely different purposes. The main role of the Church is to lead people to their salvation, while the state concerned is to make people members of an earthly kingdom. In the long run, the conflict between Church and State intensified especially because the state considered to have the power to get involved in Church affairs, often even those who were not in its jurisdiction, which determined the church to consider the state as an enemy of faith.

When Pope Pius IX came to power, the Church was in an age when it tried to redefine its role and its position in the society. Thus, the idea of summoning a council was born, especially because the situation in the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the liberal circles, had been quite tense since 1854 when Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. From that very moment a fierce battle between the ultramontanes and liberals began. Adverse reactions occurred predominantly in German and French Universities, but in the English ones too. Among the English people who were in the center of the events and whose voice was strongly heard, there was the great English historian John Emerich Edward Dalberg, known in history by the name of Lord Acton. The present work will help the reader to make a journey in the history of the relationship between Church and State in England as it was understood by Lord Acton, following several key issues in the history of the nineteenth century England: the Catholic Emancipation, the effects of the Oxford Movement, the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy, and the actions of the papacy in the nineteenth century, especially the summon of the first Vatican Council.

**The first chapter** will introduce you into the complex personality of the catholic, the liberal and the historian Lord Acton, a leading personality of the political and intellectual life of the Victorian era. He was born on the 10th of January 1834, in Naples, from a noble Roman Catholic family. His origin had a great influence on his character: he had an English father and a French-German-Italian mother. The restrictive situation of the English Roman Catholics given against them by the Penal Laws, proved later to be for Acton the starting

point for a future which in other circumstances, it wouldn't have been so brilliant. He hadn't been admitted to any of the faculties of Cambridge or Oxford University, simply because he was a Catholic, so he was forced to make his academic studies in Munich where he had been received under the guardianship of the distinguished professor of history Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890). The meeting with great professor at Munich proved to be the beginning of a new era in the life of the two, the relationship between the teacher and the disciple soon became similar to that between father and son. Since then, the teacher had an influence upon the young English student that no one had anticipated, the latter fully acquiring the ideas and the experience of his teacher. Acton was taught that history should be regarded as a science and not as literature and he understood that the historian duty was to look for the truth in all possible historical documents.

Shortly after arriving in Munich, Döllinger introduced him in the intellectual elite of the continent. They travelled together in Austria, France, Italy and England, where, in addition to their research in the archives, they had meetings with the most famous theologians and politicians of the time. In this exceptional relationship between teacher and disciple there arose a misunderstanding in the year 1879. Acton was disappointed that Döllinger appreciated a book written by one of his student, Lady Charlotte Blennerhassett, where the author praised the work of Bishop Dupanloup who underwent so easily to the dogma of infallibility. However, differences between them occurred earlier when Acton began to focus on the moral judgment of history: Acton viewed the persecutions as murders, while Döllinger regarded them as an evil only. In spite of these differences of opinion between them, they still remained friends. After the Council Döllinger as a priest was excommunicated, while Acton as a layman remained member of his Church. On the death of his beloved teacher, Acton wrote a few words to his daughter Mamy, which help us to have a better understanding of the profound relationship between the two of them: „And so, for my birthday, forty years of uninterrupted friendship ended ... He didn't always agree with me, and sometimes he was really upset on me, but I used to talk to him different problems as I never did with anyone else. ... I am sorry now, not because of his death, at such an age and with so many things he had done, but I am sorry because he had never really understood me...”<sup>1</sup>.

After several trips to Washington, Moscow and Rome Acton came to England, where he planned to create a circle like the one he had seen in Munich, to educate their co-religionists and to raise the school standards. Being a devoted Roman Catholic, Lord Acton

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<sup>1</sup> Acton's letter to his daughter Mamy written on the 11th of January 1890. Add Ms 7956, p. 40.

understood that the Church mission is to promote the principles of freedom. This determined him to keep in touch with the liberal review *The Rambler* whose editor he became in 1858. The review had a conflict with the authorities and in the year 1862 it took a new form under the title *Home and Foreign Review*. Finally, this one was suspended too and a new literary journal was founded in 1867, *The Chronicle*, which survived a year only. The last liberal journal of the nineteenth century in England was the *North British Review* where Acton continued to write articles. The entire publishing activity of Lord Acton was limited to the articles he published in the periodicals mentioned.

In February 1895 Acton was appointed Professor Regius Chair of Modern History at the University of Cambridge. Once he reached this new position, Acton had devoted himself much to the profession, trying to promote the modern research methods. His lectures were very appreciated by both students and teachers, because as Acton's successor at Cambridge, Owen Chadwick said: "When someone talked to Acton about history, it seemed that all the world's wisdom spoke through him"<sup>2</sup>.

The second chapter presents the main political events which took place in England and Rome during the nineteenth century and which had repercussions on the relationship between Church and State. The English people will break the links with Rome during the reign of Henry VIII, then the relationship with Rome will be resumed with the reign of Mary I and finally the rupture will become deeper with the coming of Elisabeth I to the throne of England. After the proclamation of Anglicanism as the Established Church in England its relation with the Holy See worsened, the Reform brought important changes in Church and State relationship. A lot of laws were given: the Pope had no right to intervene in the appointment of bishops, the monarch being the only one to have this right; everyone who wanted to submit to Rome was going to be accused of conspiracy against the king and the payment of any sums to Rome was prohibited. Thus, the English Church rejected any power of the Pope in England. Since then, the papal authority has never been accepted in the English Church or State. The English Church had been initially under the control of the crown for centuries, and in the year 1688 the power was transferred to the Parliament. The power was then again substituted to the royal supremacy in the eighteenth century and the supremacy of the crown continued to manifest in England all over the nineteenth century too.

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<sup>2</sup> Chadwick, Owen, *Acton and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 14.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Catholics in England continued to live under a series of restrictions that had been implemented by the Corporation Act (1661) and the Test Act (1673). These acts required for the English people to be part of the Anglican Church in order to obtain important social positions or a seat in the Parliament. In other words, the penal code excluded Catholics from public life, and Lord Acton used to say that "The Roman Catholics themselves were removed outside the law"<sup>3</sup>. Although few in number, they were marginalized and oppressed: there were no legal forms for Catholic marriages, the Catholics were forced to attend the Protestant church services in the army and they had to pay additional fees for their land. In 1800 Ireland, predominantly a Catholic country, was officially attached to England, a decision which meant that the Irish had to obey to the same laws. And if the English Roman Catholics seemed to accept their situation, the Catholic nobles being willing even to submit to the oath of the royal supremacy for the sake of getting a seat in the British Parliament, in Ireland the things were completely different. Daniel O'Connell began the campaign for the Catholic Emancipation in 1823. The declaration of the Irish bishops and priests in the year 1826 by which they promised that the Roman Catholic Church did not teach the infallibility of the pope, represented a very important step. The British involvement was relatively minimal, but finally, after long debates, the British and Irish Catholics achieved the *Catholic Emancipation Act* in 1829. A lot of the English Roman Catholics's restrictions were reduced by this Act. They declared that they did not recognize the temporal power of the Pope in England and that they would never initiate any action of destroying the Church of England. Their joy was short-lived as the Catholics of England and Ireland were still subjected to legal restrictions: they were asked to recognize the spiritual supremacy of the monarch, the Catholic priests were not allowed to wear the gowns in public, they had to be called „sir” not „reverend” and the access of the Catholic children in schools was still restricted. The Oxford University students had to sign that they accepted the 39 articles for being admitted, while at Cambridge the students were subjected to a special test and they had to participate to the religious services of the Anglican Church. The students had also to sign in an oath of allegiance to the crown at their graduation. However, the Catholic Emancipation Act was an important step for the English Catholics and that is why Lord Acton used to say

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<sup>3</sup> Lord Acton, *The Home Policy of the Session*, in revista „The North British Review”, vol. LII, April-July, London, 1870, p. 184-185.

that "If it (the Emancipation Act) did not remove all injustices, at least it gave the Catholics opportunities that they had never had before"<sup>4</sup>.

A special attention was granted to the collaboration between Acton and Newman in this chapter. The Catholic Emancipation Act was regarded as a threat to the Established Church by many Anglicans, most of all because there was felt the need for an intense renewal. As it was natural, the intellectuals of the English society had made the first steps towards trying to produce this change, but the result was completely opposite to what they expected. Trying to find arguments to prove that the truth is in the Anglican Church, a group of young people of the Oxford University, led by Newman, discovered that things were completely different and thus the Oxford Movement was founded. In these conditions, the number of converts increased and what was significant to note was that they were intellectuals. The new converts remarked themselves first through their journalistic activity and as well as through the actions they had taken in favour of the Roman Catholic Church, as Cardinal Newman did.

Acton and Newman: two great minds of the nineteenth century came from different cultural backgrounds, different religions, the first one was Catholic and the second one Anglican, Acton completing his studies at the intellectual center of the Catholic world - Munich, while Newman was the student of the Oxford University. What connected the two of them was first of all their concern for religion, then later their devotion to the historical research and truth.

They first collaborated intensely in terms of education. They fought for founding a Catholic University in Ireland where Newman worked seven years as a rector, and then they continued their collaboration when Acton founded the Catholic School in England where Newman worked as a teacher. At the same time, the relationship between them can be traced from the journalistic point of view as they worked together for the liberal journal *The Rambler* where Newman, somewhat forced by circumstances, took over the editorship, even if for a very short time, namely but a year. It is not surprising that there were differences in principles between them, if we consider the fact that Newman was a convert who devoted most of his life in search of truth that ultimately he thought he had founded in the Roman Catholic Church. Newman was more cautious in the application of impartiality in the historical research than Acton and he firmly believed in all dogmatic principles which were once established by the Church. For Newman religion was above history and politics because they

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<sup>4</sup> Lord Acton, *Recent Irish Legislation*, in „Home and Foreign Review”, Vol. I, July 1862, William and Norgate, London, p. 55-56.



belonged to something earthy and therefore, they were far below religion. On the issue of temporal power of the Pope too, Newman preferred to keep silent. The crisis between them increased during the Council when Newman subjected easily himself to the dogma because for a convert the submission to the authority of the Church was very important, while Acton preferred to fight to the end against a decision which could have caused serious problems for the relationship between Church and State in the Catholic world. Although the different positions Acton and Newman adopted to infallibility could break the relationship between them, this did not happen because finally in the choice between Catholicism and freedom, both chose Catholicism.

Along with the Catholic Emancipation and the Oxford Movement which marked the history of the Roman Catholic Church in England in the early nineteenth century, a lot of other events had a decisive impact upon the situation of the Roman Catholics here. The great famine in Ireland determined the migration of over a million of Irish Catholics to the UK, who joined the Oxford converts after the year 1845. The situation was quite difficult, the state being responsible for offering them jobs, shelters for their families and not least churches, that meant an increase in the number of the Catholic clergy. The English Roman Catholics indulged in staying away from the political events and that is why that the arrival of a large number of Irish Catholics who animated the English Catholic society made them feel embarrassed and offended. And to make things even more complicated for the Anglican Church, it had to deal with an impressive wave of conversions between 1840 and 1850. The new converts were the intellectuals of the English society or nobles with excellent financial situation. The English who came from traditional Catholic families and who were poor and uneducated because of the restrictions they were subjected to, regarded reticently the newcomers to their church. Their envy increased when the new converts founded catholic journals, monasteries and congregations, which implied a minimization of the old English Catholics role.

The significant increase in number of the English Catholics represented a great revival in the history of Great Britain, which implied: the building of new churches and schools on the one hand, and on the other one the need to increase the number of priests. This required the re-establishment of the English Catholic hierarchy too. The situation was difficult because the *Emancipation Act* stipulated that those who would assume the title of archbishop or bishop without the royal assent will be dismissed for such an offense. The Catholic clergy did not give up and in September 19th 1850, Pope Pius IX re-established the Catholic hierarchy in England and appointed Nicholas Wiseman as cardinal and Archbishop of

Westminster. There soon appeared adverse reactions from the Anglicans and in the year 1851 The Great Britain voted the *Church Titles Act* which fortunately remained only at the level of law.

The re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy had, obviously, several positive repercussions for the English Roman Catholic Church: the Roman Catholics began to have their own journals and newspapers, the number of monks increased, they set up special seminars where teachers were trained, there were built new churches and cathedrals, and there was an increase in the number of the clergy. In conclusion, the first part of the nineteenth century represented for the English Catholics a period of spiritual growth and an improvement of their position in the English state, even if we can not forget that there were still tensions and conflicts both between the English Catholicism and the National Protestantism and within the English Catholic community too.

In the same chapter, special attention was given to the political situation in Rome in the nineteenth century. Italy was occupied by the French in 1796. A country which had been divided into 10 separate states and that, till then, had been led by different dynasties was forced to submit to Napoleon's French troops, who occupied successively more and more Italian areas. He founded Republics where he adopted the French constitution. The French occupied Rome and formed the Roman Republic in the year 1798. In these circumstances, the coming to the power of the Pope Pius IX in 1846, was viewed with enthusiasm by Roman Catholics who saw him a person open to liberalism and modernism. When a rebellion led by Giuseppe Mazzini, who advocated for the unification of Italy, broke in 1848, the Pope was forced to go into exile to Gaeta. Returned from the exile in 1850, Pius IX canceled his old liberal principles, and France became again the protector of Rome. In the same year, however, the Roman government announced the founding of the Republic and the end of the papal regime. The new constitution deprived the Pope of the temporal power and encouraged the equality of all citizens irrespective of their religion. Thus the struggle for the temporal power began. The Pope ordered that all those who were going to be involved in the actions of annexing the Papal State to what was to become the Kingdom of Italy to be excommunicated.

The unification of the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861 and Rome was the only area that was not attached to it. The Italian troops occupied Rome in 1870 and the city was proclaimed the capital of Italy. This led to the breaking of Church and State relations, which was a disadvantage for both parts: the pope lost his temporal power and the Italian state didn't have the papacy on its side.

The problem of the temporal power of the Pope concerned Lord Acton too, who began to publish articles on the subject in the *Rambler*, entitled *The Roman Question*. Acton researched historically the problem of the temporal power of the Pope and concluded that in the ancient times it was a necessity for the Church to be protected by state. In the nineteenth century, however, it was not a necessity any more but it was an obstacle to the unification of the church. Acton believed that the temporal power should be distinguished from the essence of the Church, and therefore, they should give it up especially because the whole Italian nation demanded it. Acton also wrote about the tension between Napoleon and Pope Pius IX in his articles. Rome had no longer the support of France, just when Garibaldi's expedition for unifying Italy had started in 1862. Thus, Acton claimed for the renouncement of the temporal power as it was in opposition to the unity which, at that time, was the main target of the Italian state.

In 1871 only, the Church-State relationship in Italy improved when the government passed *the guarantees law* by which the sovereign status of the Pope as an independent person was recognized. By the same law, the pope was given the freedom to enjoy diplomatic relations with other countries. In 1929 a concordat between the Holy See and the Italian Government was signed, by which the latter recognized the temporal power of the Pope over a certain territory, and the Pope, in turn, recognized the Italian state. In conclusion, the Roman Catholic Church from Rome had to face a number of political problems during the nineteenth century.

**The third chapter** deals with the period of the first Vatican Council and the position that Lord Acton had towards its decisions. Two days before the publication of *Quaranta Cura* and of *Syllabus*, in December 1864, Pope Pius IX announced a group of cardinals about his intention of summoning a council. Having received a favorable response from them, the Special ruling Committee for the future general council was formed. A lot of special committees were founded which had started the preparations for the next Council since March 1865. Their members were to determine the issues that would be discussed at the Council. It is interesting to note that among their members there were English people too: Bishop William Weathers (1814-1895), Edward Henry Howard (1829-1892) and the last but not leastly, Cardinal Manning. Their presence in Rome during the preparation of the future council is important because it was decided then that infallibility would be discussed, and the English bishops did not oppose to the decision.

The official announcement of summoning the council was made in June 29th 1868 by Bula *Patris Aeternis* where the infallibility was not mentioned at all, the intention of

promulgating the new dogma being announced by *Civiltá Catolica* in April 1869 only. Once this intention announced, the situation became tenser in the Liberal circles. The things began to precipitate in England too and Herrnsheim, Lord Acton's property, became the meeting place of the bishops who were to be part of the minority group: Bishop Dupanloup, Hefele and Kettler.

A special attention was given to the relationship between Acton and Döllinger during the evolution of the first Vatican Council. Acton, the most influential English Roman Catholic, arrived in Rome in November 10th 1869, with a well defined mission: to do everything for the new dogma not to be promulgated. At the beginning, he tried to get in touch with all the bishops who arrived in Rome and he spent most of his time around the opponents bishops of infallibility. In political circles there was the fear that infallibility would affect the relationship between Church and State especially in Catholic countries where the catholic believers had to face the dilemma to obey to state or church. Among the opponent bishops Acton mentioned: most of the Germans, Austrians and Hungarians, half French, all the Portuguese and half of North Americans and Canadians.

In this tense atmosphere the opening ceremony of the council took place in December 18th 1869. There was already known in Rome that Acton was the one who led the opposition. Then our hero decided to speak and in December 1869 he began to write for the German newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung*. His letters became known by the name *Letters from Rome on the Council* and they were published under the pseudonym of Quirinius. The purpose of the 69 letters sent by Acton to his teacher Döllinger was to inform the public of what was going on at the council and to intimidate the majority. The letters give us a clear picture of the problems faced by the minority. For Acton it was quite difficult to understand what had determined the British bishops to join the new dogma since they knew that they had obtained emancipation by denying the infallibility of the pope. He hoped however, that the 200 opponent prelates would organize themselves in an action of protest. The new dogma was going to cause huge troubles in Church-State relations: it was going to attract the hatred of other religions *in America* and it meant that there was the danger for the Catholics to be excluded from public services; *in Russia* the new dogma that was going to appear in the catechisms and taught in schools would have created much opposition from the government; *in Belgium* the new dogma was considered an insult to the state and it would have had negative repercussions on the clergy.

Meanwhile the discussions in the Council were developing and Acton says that the freedom of the prelates was increasingly violated and their speeches interrupted. The

antiinfallibilists were systematically excluded from the committees. In February 1870 Döllinger published an article in *Allgemeine Zeitung* where he criticized the new dogma and he did not recognize the ecumenical status of the Council of Florence (1438-1439). Thus his prestige among the minority bishops declined. The German bishops condemned Döllinger's writing and Acton began to criticize the weakness of the minority.

The distribution of the program that included infallibility took place on the 6th of March 1870. Acton understood then that the minority had to take more severe measures and he proposed them to require unanimity in final decisions and to refuse their participation at the meetings if infallibility would not be withdrawn from the council agenda. He was discontent that they did not follow his advice and he severely criticized the council bishops. The fight was now between history which hold the truth and theology. And from this point of view, things were differently understood by the two friends, teacher and disciple: for Döllinger the dogma violated theology and history, while for Acton it was an offense to morality and history. Acton's influence in Rome declined from the middle of May. He went home in June 10th 1870 hoping that the minority bishops would not submit to the pressure of the Curia. Finally, the great session for the promulgation of the new dogma was established on the 17th of July 1870. The opposing bishops left Rome. In July 18th 1870, when the dogma was accepted, Acton was at his property in Bavaria. He fought as much as he could to avoid this end, but the fight proved to be in vain. He could not stop, as he says in the 69th letter "the end of drama".

Simultaneously with his letters to Döllinger, Acton wrote 12 letters from Rome to the British Prime Minister Gladstone. The intention was to determine the English intellectuals and the British government to support the minority group. A careful analysis of these letters helps us to understand both the English government and the other European governments position to the decrees of the council. Acton asks Gladstone his permission for presenting his opinion in Rome about the effects that the new doctrine would produce in England. Gladstone agreed and as the debates were going on, our historian felt that the minority group needed the help of governments. In February 2nd 1870, Acton asked the French government to withdraw its protection of Rome if dogma was going to be promulgated. Napoleon declared that such a decree would cancel all agreements between France and the Vatican, but Rome did not seem to be affected by this statement. Vienna sent a representative to announce Antonelli on the consequences that dogma would have on Church and State relations. Austria proposed Prussia and Bavaria to join. Bavaria has appealed to England to support the opposition and Gladstone agreed. Meanwhile, the French bishops told Acton to ask for the help of England because it

could urged the major powers to join forces. The problem is that Gladstone was alone in trying to solve this problem because the British government refused its involvement considering that it would have damaged the relations with the Holy See. Acton's concern increased when France delayed its intervention because of Jesuits who succeeded in distracting Napoleon III and adversed Prussia against France. Thus, Napoleon had other problems and he forgot about the relative conflict with the infallible Pope.

However, in April 6th 1870 the French government supported by Portugal, Prussia and Spain, sent a memorandum to Rome objecting to what *Schema de Ecclesia* contained. England remained neutral and did not support France in this memorandum, although it shared the concerns of the French government. Finally, the fight of the two friends, Acton and Gladstone to prevent the promulgation of the dogma and to determine the government intervention in supporting the minority bishops proved not to be sufficient to be victorious. Manning discovered their plan and despised Acton even more.

After the council, the English bishops returned home. Some of them, like Manning, Ullathorne, William Turner and James Brown started to explain the new dogma of infallibility to their faithful in the pastorals. Newman preferred again to keep silent and he waited to see the opinions of other bishops like Clifford and Dupanloup. The two English bishops who supported the minority, Errington and Clifford, preferred to wait for the next movement of the minority. Finally, in December 9th 1870, Clifford wrote to Newman that he accepted the decrees because they were already taught throughout the Church. The last English Catholic bishop who joined the new dogma was George Errington in February 1872.

Lord Acton's first reaction after the council was his writing *An Open Letter to a German bishop on the Vatican Council*, published in *The Times*. Here the author urged the minority bishops to break the silence and he published excerpts from their speeches in Rome. He also criticized the German bishops if they were going to subject to the new dogma. The answer came in a letter sent to *The Times* by Bishop Ketteler of Meyence in which he denied all Acton's incriminations against them. Acton did not answer the bishop, probably because he believed that it would be a useless battle.

In 1874 another English Catholic writing upseted the world. Gladstone wrote *The Vatican decrees in their bearing on Civil Allegiance: a political expostulation* where he accused the Vatican Council of the denial of intellectual freedom and of the rejection of modern thought and history. Acton responded with four letters to *The Times* in which he tried to prove that the pope had had the same power before the council too. Newman congratulated him for his temperance. These letters to *The Times* remained the only public point of Acton's

view expressed in this controversy. At the end of 1874 Acton accepted the decrees, arguing that if the Church representatives had accepted them, he is but a laymen who had no right to try to explain issues related to theology. He subjected because he wanted to remain Catholic, and still to be an example for his children. Acton preferred to withdraw from this fight because he felt he was misunderstood and he had the feeling of failure and disappointment. No doubt, the abandonment of the bishops who fought alongside with him during the council, represented the biggest disappointment of his life.

**The fourth chapter** presents the relationship between Church and state from the point of view of Acton's liberalism. Our hero had always been concerned about freedom because the American, English and French Revolution represented for him the key moments in the development of freedom in the modern era. He became the supporter of liberalism when he met Döllinger, the leader of the liberal movement in Germany. The Liberal Catholicism, whose Acton became a great supporter, insisted on freedom of research and on the belief that religious truth and science must be compatible. The tension between the liberal Catholics and the Church increased in 1859 after the publication of *The Origin of Species* written by Darwin, when the Church considered the book to be an attack on religion.

Acton's liberalism was conducted on two directions: in journalism and politics. In *Rambler* and *Home and Foreign Review* Acton initially promoted his liberal ideas. Having a conflict with the authorities both journals were abolished, the liberals English Catholics, led by Acton, then continuing to write in *The Chronicle* and *North British Review*. At the age of 23, Acton made his debut in politics and he became member of the Irish Parliament for Carlow. He was not an active politician, being more interested in history than in politics. In the short time when he had flirted with politics, Acton was involved but in several committees: the committee which dealt with the poor law, the commission of investigating the effectiveness of the country diplomatic services and the commission that dealt with births, marriages and deaths laws.

Acton's concept of freedom is summarized in his lectures entitled *Liberty in Antiquity* and *Liberty and Christianity*, held in 1877 in Bridgnorth. We can see here what the liberal Acton meant by liberty: "The freedom means the insurance that all people will be encouraged to do what they consider their duty to for the authority, for the institutions and for the public opinion. The state has the power to trace and delimit between good and evil only in its

immediate sphere"<sup>5</sup>. The two lectures are an overview of the history of freedom and they are a synthesis of the famous *Madonna of the Future* that Acton intended to write. All his life he gathered material for what would have to become the greatest unwritten book. It is to be found today only in the form of notes in the library of the University of Cambridge and although there were many attempts, no one had managed to write this history from his manuscripts. Probably the only one able to do it would have been Acton himself.

As liberal, Acton shared the liberals' ideas regarding the Church-State relationship: the toleration of all religions, the freedom to manifest the religious beliefs and the freedom of conscience. Regarding the relationship between Church and State the two institutions have the same final purpose in Acton's view. The great aim of a Christian state is to keep permanently the two spheres separated: to give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. With these words there was avoided any kind of absolutism, said Acton. Through them Christ inaugurated the freedom and repudiated the absolutism. For Acton the Church, as long as it does not interfere with the State, becomes the guarantee against absolutism. He was convinced that where the politics and religion are united there is no freedom. And he had the specific example of England in this respect. The relationship between Church and State promoted by Acton was "*a national Church not entirely separated from the state*"<sup>6</sup>.

Although Acton comes to the conclusion that the Church must be separated from the state, he acknowledges that the Church wouldn't live in its plenitude if it didn't enjoy the political recognition. This is because the Catholics needed education given by the state, they needed the recognition of their Christian Catholic families and also the financial support from the state. Separation of church and state was understood by our liberal to the point that the state should not impose its authority over the Church, it should not involve in theological issues: "The government must deal with those things related to the government, not to the problems of the Church"<sup>7</sup>, Acton used to say.

And if the Church needed the state, the latter needed a religion that should have a moral influence upon it. The moral principles promoted by Church should be reflected in the political systems of the nations. According to Acton, the State could not have a good government without the Church. For Acton, a truly Christian state was a liberal one, and in a liberal state consciousness meant everything. People had the duty to reject the verdict decided

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<sup>5</sup> Lord Acton, *Libertatea în antichitate*, in Lord Acton, „Despre libertate”, translated into Romanian by Ligia Constantinescu și Mihai Eugen Avădanei, Ed. Institutul European, Iași, 2000, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Add Mss 4865, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Add Mss 4932, p. 11.



by the authorities and to judge what was right or wrong in the light of what God had set in man: consciousness. Catholicity was stronger than freedom in the first part of his life. Gradually, however, there was a change in his development: the freedom became for Acton more important than the catholicity. Thus, we find him a devout Catholic, and later to find him still a Catholic, but far from what the papacy promoted. In Acton's view, two principles should have a priority in the relationship between Church and state: morality and freedom.

In conclusion, Acton's position regarding the Church and State relations from the liberal point of view can be summarized to the fear for the abuse of power both in Church and State. He said that "the real principle is: the Church bridles the State and the State bridles the Church"<sup>8</sup>. Acton wanted therefore, the Church to be free and independent from the state, but at the same time the two institutions to support each other when necessary, each of them respecting one other's freedom.

Regarding the relationship between Church and State in England today, the status of the Anglican Church in the state remained unchanged from the Reformation to the present day. At first, the Anglican Church relation with the state was limited to the presence of 26 bishops and 2 archbishops in the House of Lords. Then, by the Test Laws enacted during 1673 and 1678, the political power of the church members declined much, as they were forced to subject to the oath of supremacy in order to hold high positions in state.

Legally, the Church of England is represented by the two Councils: of York and Canterbury. However, they can not decide anything without the crown accept. Moreover, the clergy of the Anglican Church created no problems to the British crown, along history, showing it unconditional obedience. During the reign of James I (1566-1625) the disobedience was considered a great sin, then, James II (1633-1701) provided religious tolerance repealing all the penal laws given against the Roman Catholic religion. A new chapter in the relationship between church and state began during the time of William III (1650-1702) when the authority which hitherto belonged to the crown passed to the sphere of Parliament. In 1717 the synod activity was suspended, and the Church began to be regarded as a department of the state under the control of parliament.

In the nineteenth century the English state interests for the Church minimized a lot. The Bishops attended less frequently the meetings of the parliament and they were not consulted before a law that could affect the church was going to be promulgated. The result was the Catholic Emancipation and the re-establishment of the English Catholic hierarchy.

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<sup>8</sup> Add Mss 5915.

Today, the English Church is involved in political activities, but its involvement consists in expressing opinions only. For the state the council opinion should not be ignored, but it should not differ much from that of the political groups in power. The Parliament doesn't have the power to change the law proposed by the council, but it has the right to reject it. Nothing can be changed in the doctrine without the parliamentary approval. Therefore, there is a very close connection between the English Established Church and the State. Church and state have each of them their role in leading the nation, but in England the two institutions are so united that it is quite difficult to make a clear distinction between their spheres of influence.

Regarding the relationship between the English Roman Catholic Church with the Anglican Church and with the British state, the misunderstandings are not only theological but they are a struggle for power. The attitude of hostility towards Rome developed in time and it is quite clear that the Rome desire of dominance will always cause a conflict between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Today the relationship between the two churches is limited to acceptance and tolerance. In the current ecumenism there are many debates for the union of the two Churches, but problems that divide them still remained unresolved.

A far as the Anglicans' attitude towards Lord Acton, they feel respect and admiration for his courage, and he is recognized in the intellectual circles by his famous statement: "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". The members of his Church perceive him as the historian and the liberal Catholic who fought for freedom in his country. For the Roman Catholics Acton is an example of devotion for historical research and freedom who even if there was a period of "straying" in his life, he came to himself and remained in his Church.

In conclusion, Acton was one of the greatest historians of his time who distinguished himself through his attitude towards history and the depth of his thinking.

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