

## **HILDEBRAND'S REVOLUTION MAKES THE POPES SUPREME IN CHRISTENDOM**

The empire created by Charlemagne was thought of in an ideal way as a continuation of the Roman Empire, but it had neither Roman Law nor Roman legions, neither Rome as its capital nor the Senate. It was a shapeless and unorganized conglomeration, with no urban centers and little trade. Its officials were neither civic magistrates nor trained civil servants; it boasted only territorial magnates and tribal chieftains. But nevertheless, it embodied in its own way a great idea: the concept of Europe as a commonwealth of Christian peoples, a single society embracing a wide variety of peoples, organized in numerous states but bound together in a framework of mutual rights and duties and united in a common faith and a common moral and intellectual culture. To that commonwealth all Europeans felt they belonged even after the breakdown of Charlemagne's experiment and the rise of feudalism, and it was the same idea that inspired the formation of the new order that arose in the West in the eleventh century.

This union of temporal and spiritual in one commonwealth meant in practice that this unique body had two heads. But who was the final authority-Pope or Emperor? Church or state? It was a

question that would trouble minds and cause rivers of blood to flow when the great Pope Gregory VII, known as Hildebrand, in the mid-eleventh century revived the long-dormant claim that final authority rested with the Pope.

As long as Charlemagne ruled, there was no problem. No one dared to challenge his supremacy. He concerned himself with everything that affected the government of the Christian body-not excluding matters involving the life of the Church. It was not quite what the Popes had bargained for when they sealed the alliance with his father, Pepin.

Charlemagne's exercise of authority over the Church was, indeed, in opposition to the long-standing papal theory about the relation of the temporal to the spiritual authority. As formulated by Pope Gelasius (d. 496), this theory gave the Pope the right to direct and orientate the Christian commonwealth toward its final goal: eternal salvation. The Emperor's function was merely to promote the temporal welfare of its members and to protect their corporate union. This was symbolized in the coronation ceremony when the Pope placed a sword in the hands of the Emperor.

In line with this theory, the Popes after Charlemagne tried to assert their supreme authority over Christendom-and with some success-during the ninth century. Pope Stephen crowned Louis the

Pious, Charlemagne's son and successor, in 816 at Rheims, and made it clear that the crown itself derived from the successor of Peter. Further strengthening of the papal position occurred in 823 when Louis' son Lothar came to Rome to be crowned. Henceforth Rome was considered the only right and proper place for imperial coronations.

Succeeding Popes in the ninth century continued to assert this supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal power and maintained successfully-more or less-the right of the Church to intervene in the affairs of state. This theocratic view of the social order was made to prevail so that the state was no longer regarded as something distinct but was seen rather as an aspect of the Church.

The apex of this trend was reached with the pontificate of Nicholas I (858-67), who acted as the arbiter of Western Christendom. In crowning the Emperor and giving him the sword, he made clear the act's symbolic meaning: The Emperor's duty was to act as the protector of the Roman Church, the epitome of the whole Church. John VIII (d.882) advanced the cause of papal supremacy by successfully asserting the right of the Popes not only to crown but also to choose the Emperor. This happened in 875, when he offered the crown to Charles the Bald. One indication of this general recognition of the Pope's

supremacy over the temporal order is a change in terminology: His residence at the Lateran after 813 or so is no longer the "Patriarchate" but the "Sacred Palace of the Lateran."

But then the whole question of papal and imperial authority faded away as both Empire and papacy began to disintegrate. Constant division and quarreling among the heirs of Charlemagne was a major factor in the breakdown of the Empire. Louis the Pious (d. 840), the weak and indecisive son of Charles, had four sons, who quarreled constantly among themselves and with their father over their respective shares of the Empire. Eventually the three surviving sons, Louis the German, Charles the Bald, and Lothar, divided the Empire into three separate parts, the Western (corresponding roughly to modern France) going to Charles, and the Eastern (corresponding roughly to modern Germany) going to Louis, with Lothar taking the elongated section in between.

For a brief moment the Empire was put back together again under Charles the Fat when both the East and the West Franks accepted his rule. But they rebelled and deposed him in 887. The Empire crumbled totally while Viking and Magyar invaders ran amok, ushering in a period of barbarian anarchy and carrying Europe into the age of feudalism.

It would be difficult, as Dawson says, to exaggerate the horror and confusion of the dark age that followed the breakdown of the Carolingian experiment. The Synod of Trosle recorded the despair of the bishops at the prospect of the complete ruin of Christian society: The cities are depopulated, the monasteries ruined and burned, the country reduced to solitude. as the first men lived without law or fear of God, abandoned to their passions, so now every man does what seems good in his own eyes, despising laws human and divine and the commands of the Church. The strong oppress the weak; the world is full of violence against the poor and of the plunder of ecclesiastical goods. • • • Men devour one another like the fishes in the sea.!

With the Empire in decay, its sister institution, the papacy, also slid slowly into the abyss. It became a slave to local Roman factions and the victim of political intrigue, losing all moral and spiritual authority. It reached the nadir in the pontificate of John XII (d. 964), who ascended the throne at the age of eighteen and recalled by his dissolute style of life the age of the Roman Emperor Nero.

With such Popes on the seat of Peter, complete oblivion covered the once-exalted claims of the papacy to supreme authority over Christendom. And when the Empire revived in the tenth century and Christendom

with it, it was the Emperors who were in a better position to exercise the supreme authority-both temporal and spiritual.

This revival of the Empire occurred in the Kingdom of the East Franks ( the German segment) under a new dynasty of Kings. Feudalism had not made as much progress here as elsewhere, thanks to the strong cohesive tribal consciousness of the four German peoples-the Saxons, Bavarians, Swabians, and Franconian. Here language, law, and tribe occupied relatively defined and solid areas. This new Empire was considered a continuation of Charlemagne's, though, in fact, it was much smaller, since it did not include any French or Spanish territory. It was indeed predominantly German, though reaching into Italy-the first of Germany's three Reichs.

The origin of this new version of the Empire can be traced to Henry the duke of Saxony, but it was his son Otto the Great ( d. 973) who consciously revived the tradition of Charlemagne by seeking the crown from the Pope. Otto's coronation took place February 2, 962, in St. Peter's Basilica, with Pope John XII presiding.

In reviving the Empire, Otto made great use of the Church, which he found to be the most effective force in the struggle against disorder. He regarded the bishops as his most suitable collaborators by reason of

their education and their lack of children. This last fact was especially important, since one of the chief threats to monarchy in a feudal society was the practice of families getting control of land and regarding it as their own independent domain and thus creating a rival dynasty to the King. Unmarried bishops could not pass duchies or counties on to their sons. This meant that at the death of the bishop, the King was once more free to choose the man he preferred for the job as duke or count instead of seeing the position automatically pass to the son of the deceased. So wherever he could, he placed bishops in charge. His own brother, Bruno, the archbishop of Cologne, he installed as duke of Lotharingia.

For such a system to succeed it was necessary to have the co-operation of the Pope, who in spite of the papacy's degraded state was still recognized as the head of the Church. This is why Otto sought his crown from the Pope, confirmed the donations of Pepin and Charlemagne, and guaranteed the independence of the papal states.

But understandably, the previous claims of the papacy to supremacy over the temporal power were set aside, if not forgotten, in this new Saxon Empire. The future relationship of the Saxon Emperors with the Popes was, in fact, foreshadowed in the way Otto treated John XII. Within a year of the coronation, Otto had

John deposed on the charge of treason and had a layman elected in his place. Otto ruled that in the future no Pope was to be consecrated until he had first taken an oath of allegiance to the Emperor. In the new Ottonian Empire the Popes, like the bishops, were to be the nominees and the lieutenants of the temporal sovereign. There followed over the next century a succession of Ottos and Henrys who carried on Otto's intimate union of Church and state—employing bishops as officials of the crown making and unmaking Popes as they saw fit, but often at the same time showing remarkable zeal for the reform of the Church.

Henry III (1039-56), the most powerful of the Emperors, was the pre-eminent example of this approach. A royal theocrat who often dressed in the robes of a biblical high priest, ornamented with apocalyptic and zodiacal emblems to symbolize his regal-sacerdotal role, he believed himself appointed by God to take care of all the interests of his people. He chose bishops and Popes, making sure in each case that the candidate was fit for the office. When Benedict IX (1032-45) was chased out of Rome by an anti-Pope who in turn was replaced by the virtuous archpriest, John Gratian, Henry intervened, and in synods held at Sutri and Rome deposed all three men. And characteristically, the Popes he subsequently

installed-Clement II (d. 1047), Damasus II (1048), Leo IX (1054), and Victor II (d. 1057)-were men of the highest caliber.

.This dominance over the Church by the lay power was true not only in Germany-everywhere in Europe the feudal potentates were applying more or less the same kind of system, using the Church as they saw fit. The old canon law that required that a bishop be elected by clergy and people was completely forgotten. Actual control over the appointment was seized by the King and his great vassals. A ceremony called lay investiture reflected this fact: The bishop-to-be knelt before the lord, rendered him homage and fealty, and received from him his staff and ring. The land and attached jurisdiction also conferred on him at the same time were regarded as a fief whose feudal obligations took precedence over ecclesiastical ones. The whole transaction was tainted with simony besides, since the new bishop ordinarily paid a heavy fee for his promotion. Moreover, this simony commerce in spiritual goods-was rife throughout the whole Church. The parish priest too was subject to laymen by the proprietary system of ownership whereby laymen owned the Church property and hired the priests they pleased. This control by laymen was in obvious contradiction with the ancient canon law and

tradition of the Church and seemed to many to be a violation of its intrinsic liberty and very nature.

So as spiritual energy began to flow through the Church again—as in the great monasteries reformed by Cluny, the influential Burgundian monastery founded in 910—it would be only a matter of time before Churchmen came forward who were unafraid of asking this portentous question: How can laymen hold supreme authority over the body that Christ had committed to his apostles and their successors, the bishops? The very reform of the papacy that Henry III ironically enough did so much to advance finally brought men to the fore who undermined his system by daring to ask this question. Outstanding among them was Cardinal Humbert (d. 106!), whose *Libri adversus simoniacos*—the first frontal attack on the whole position of laymen within the Church denounced the proprietary Church system and lay investiture as twin manifestations of the same evil: perversion of proper order. The principle of right order in the Church, he argued, demanded that laymen be obedient to the clergy. Bishops must first be elected by the clergy, then acclaimed by the people; no longer should they be invested with the insignia of their office by laymen. Rather after election, they should be examined and then consecrated by the metropolitan and the neighboring bishops.

But he went even farther, reviving the ancient doctrine of Pope Gelasius in asserting not only that the laymen must obey the priest inside the Church, but that even outside, in the temporal order, they are subject to the spiritual authority of the hierarchy. This conclusion Humbert drew by rigorous logic from his basic premise: the unitary nature of society. Since Church and State actually form one body, Christendom-whose animating principle is the faith-it can be directed to its final goal, eternal salvation, only by the priesthood. Therefore, whenever the spiritual and temporal come into conflict-as often they must-the spiritual authority must have the final word.

It was a bold stroke indeed-nothing less than a claim for the Pope of total sovereignty over the world, and a program for revolutionizing the whole feudal social economic and political order as it had developed since Otto the Great.

But before anyone could even dream of carrying it out, the papacy itself had to be liberated from the iron grip of the Emperor. The chance occurred when Henry III died in 1056, leaving behind only his six-year-old son, Henry IV, while Pope Victor died the very next year. The reform party in the Curia seized this golden opportunity by electing one of their own,

Stephen IX; when he soon died, they elected, in spite of the machinations of the Roman nobles, another reform-minded Churchman, Nicholas II (d. 1061). The way was now clear for the epoch-making decree of 1059, which formally excluded the Emperor and the riotous Roman nobles from a part in papal elections. Henceforth only the cardinals were to elect the Pope, although some type of confirmation was allowed to the Emperor. The decree was upheld in its crucial trial of strength in 1061 at the death of Nicholas. In the teeth of violent opposition from the Roman nobles, the cardinals elected another reformer, Anselm of Lucca-Alexander II—who in order to mount his throne had to overcome the combined forces of the Roman nobles, Lombard bishops, and imperial magnates.

But it was only with the election of Hildebrand, Gregory VII in 1073 that a man arrived on the scene with willpower colossal enough to put Humbert's theory into practice and assert papal supremacy in a thorough fashion. Hildebrand's physical and mental qualities were unexceptional: Small in stature, weak in voice, he was only moderately learned, but he had the fiery temperament of an Old Testament prophet and drew men to him by the vigor of his imagination, the bright keenness of his eyes, and his tremendous passion for righteousness. As his famous *Dictatus papae*

(1075) slow he was committed to an unqualified view of papal authority: All souls must obey his definitions of right and wrong; he had an unlimited power of excommunication and absolution; God alone could be his judge. In accordance with Gelasian theory, he claimed the right to punish and even depose disobedient rulers, for the papacy was to the Empire as the sun to the moon.

As the new Pope assumed command, he found a somewhat encouraging situation; under the reinvigorated papacy, the reform movement had made progress. The papacy had vindicated the independence of its own elections, gained recognition of its authority over all archbishops and bishops, and was beginning to recover its rule over the papal states. But there were many problems. The clergy stoutly resisted the papal decrees against simony and clerical marriage, while the arrogant and ill-disciplined young Henry IV showed little sympathy with the idea of reform and was obviously bent on keeping royal control over episcopal nominations.

Things began well, however, in Gregory's relations with the Emperor. A deadlock over an episcopal appointment to Milan was broken when Henry yielded to the papal will. It seemed a good omen, and Gregory joyfully entertained a magnificent dream of a united Empire and papacy working together in

harmony for the good of souls, with neither infringing on the other's proper sphere of power. But Henry's compliance was feigned, due only to pressure from internal troubles in Germany. He was waiting for these to clear up before he showed his real intention of subordinating the Pope. The issue that forced a showdown was the system of lay investiture or lay control over episcopal appointments which, as we have seen, the reformers considered the root of evil in the Church. They wanted instead a return to free elections, which they believed would give the Church personnel equal to the tasks of reform. And a decree against lay investiture was passed by Gregory's synod in 1075. But Henry was not about to give up his control over his bishops. If he and other rulers of the time could not control the clerical landowners whose fiefs were scattered across their domains, their whole civil administration would be disrupted. And so in deliberate defiance of the decree he invested his own choice for archbishop of Milan, a certain Tedald.

A momentous decision now had to be faced: Was the Pope really supreme on earth? Gregory was not the kind of man to sidestep. He sent Henry an ultimatum: Either respect the investiture decree or face excommunication and possible deposition. It reached the Emperor while he was still fresh from a victory over the rebellious Saxons and in no mood to submit.

Gathering his puppet bishops around him in a Council at Worms, he pronounced scathing judgment upon "Hildebrand, at present not Pope but false monk," and denounced him for daring to threaten him with deposition, "as if the kingdom and the empire were in thine and not in God's hand!" And he cried out, "Descend and relinquish the apostolic chair which thou hast usurped. . . . Descend, descend, to be damned throughout the ages.'<sup>12</sup>

This insolent decree was read by the Pope to a hastily assembled synod of bishops, who reacted with fury. Calling on St. Peter, Gregory then proceeded to excommunicate Henry and his accomplice bishops and declared Henry deposed.

Events then moved swiftly to a climax. The papal ban struck Henry with devastating effect. His supporters melted away, and his enemies used it to rally against him. A diet at Tribur on October 10, 1076, gave Henry until February 22, 1077, to obtain absolution and invited the Pope to preside at Hildebrand's Revolution Makes Popes Supreme 127 a German council to determine the Emperor's worthiness to reign. In desperation Henry acted with singular resolution. Taking only a few supporters, his wife, and his infant son, he braved the wintry snow and ice of the nearly impassable Alps, and in January 1077 reached the castle of Countess Mathilda at Canossa,

where the Pope had stopped on his way to Germany. There garbed in penitential rags, Henry stood barefoot in the snow-filled courtyard for three days begging absolution from the Pontiff. Gregory searched his soul in an effort to escape an awful dilemma. His political sense told him not to trust the fallen monarch, not to let the German princes down, and not to forfeit the best advantage he had; but his conscience as a priest prevailed, and reluctantly he gave Henry absolution.

Henry's enemies were not deterred; they deposed him anyway and elected Rudolf, duke of Swabia, as Emperor. Then both parties appealed to the Pope to decide between the contenders. But Henry was unwilling to submit to a papal decision, and so Gregory proceeded to excommunicate him again and depose him as contumacious at a Lenten synod in 1080. And imprudently he went out on a limb, prophesying that Henry would be defeated or dead within a few months. The prophecy boomeranged when Henry triumphed over Rudolf. Public opinion in Germany turned against the Pope, who now appeared to be the aggressor-having exceeded his powers in trying to dethrone the temporal head of Western Christendom. Henry, in consequence, could count on more support, and so once more in concert with his bishops he pronounced sentence of deposition against

Gregory and put an anti-Pope in his place. Then Henry marched on Rome and sieged Gregory. The Roman people were unequal to the rigors of a long siege and, led by a majority of the cardinals, weakened in their loyalty to Gregory's cause until finally Henry was able to bribe them into handing over Rome. The Pope barely managed to escape into the castle of Sant'Angelo, The next move came from the papal vassal, the Norman ruler of southern Italy, Robert Guiscard, who came to Gregory's rescue and drove Henry out. But in doing so, he reduced Rome to cinders and ashes. The infuriated populace blamed the destruction on Gregory, who had to seek refuge with Robert in Salerno. There, overwhelmed by a deep sense of failure and with the anti-Pope once more ensconced in Rome, Gregory breathed his last on May 25, 1085, uttering the words, "I have loved justice and hated iniquity. therefore I die in exile."

Gregory was dead, but his cause remained very much alive. His immediate successor was something of a neutral nonentity, but with the election of Urban II, in 1088, Gregory's legate to Germany in the critical years 1084-85 and like himself a Cluniac monk, the right man was found to continue the work. Urban was dedicated like Gregory to the task of emancipating the Church from lay control, but unlike Gregory, he was essentially moderate and pragmatic.

While Henry IV floundered around in Italy trapped by his enemies, deserted by his wife and son, and fated to die amid the wreckage of all his hopes, the papacy under Urban moved from success to success. Urban held a synod at Clermont in 1095, where he called the knights of Christendom to a crusade against the Moslems. With overwhelming enthusiasm, the fords of Europe rallied around the papal banner. It was a striking demonstration of the power the Pope now exerted over the minds and hearts of men-a moral authority that no Emperor or King could hope to rival.

Nevertheless, the question of lay investiture with its many thorny aspects was not easily solved. But finally various forms of compromise were worked out in the different countries of Europe. Three main points were agreed on: The bishop would henceforth be elected by the clergy with a certain minimal participation of the laity-and in the; presence of the monarch and therefore to some extent under his influence. The new bishop would no longer be invested with the spiritual insignia of his office-his ring and staff-by the secular ruler. He would be invested, however, by the temporal ruler with the symbols of his temporal authority and offer homage to him; in Germany this homage was to take place before consecration. The German version of this settlement was embodied in the Concordat of Worms ( 1122).

This compromise meant that the Emperor could still exercise great influence over the choice of bishops. The final victory of the papacy was not due simply to the logic of Hildebrand but owed much, if not more, to a shift in dynasties. When Henry IV's son, Henry V, died in 1125, he was succeeded by Lothar of the Welf family, which had traditionally supported the Popes in the struggle with Henry. This coupled with the fact that Lothar needed the Church's help in securing his position enabled the Popes to gain control over the German bishops.

So Hildebrand's dream finally materialized-with more than a little help from the accidents of history. But the fact remained: There was now a new papacy symbolized by the right of the Popes to wear the imperial insignia, including the tiara, a conical-shaped headdress with a crown surrounding it. (Later this was changed to two crowns by Innocent III and to three by Boniface VIII.) The Pope was now indeed a world ruler and would dominate the life of Europe-both spiritual and temporal-for centuries.