

humility, they have not realised the good which they implemented. The judgment hinges solely upon the corporal works of mercy. The same is true in much of the teaching found in the Gospel of Luke.³⁸

Thus a study of the Gospel in distinction from St Paul calls us to a radical social sensitivity but one which is not to be achieved save through the grace of God, personal living faith in His Son Jesus and a continual communication and inspiration of the Holy Spirit who will teach us all things and bring to our remembrance all that Jesus said to us (cf John 14:26).

³⁸The author realises that she has not used a redactional critical methodology but is preparing this at more length in a book probably to be entitled *The Evolution of Social Consciousness in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition*.

The Papacy and the Historian VI: Kith and Kingship

Eric John

I want to take as my next vantage point from which to survey the traditions of papalism the achievement of the policy Gregory the Great had started—though it had acquired some accretions he might not have cared for very much—the confiding of the rule of the Church to a specially marked-off status group of ordained persons. This is usually called the Gregorian Reformation, after its most famous protagonist Gregory VII. This is very misleading, especially as it leads scholars to see Gregory VII's pontificate as the beginning of something when it is just as much a dead end. Gregory is supposed to have been an original and creative pontiff who saw the truth that the Church was subject to the Babylonish captivity of the lay princes of the day, notably the German Emperor (or potential Emperor to be strictly correct). He surveyed the great traditions of the Catholic religion, starting with St Paul, and by wielding his remarkable gifts of iron logic he laid the foundations of a recovery of Christian liberty. This meant in practice a hierarchical Church much more tightly governed than ever before but by clerics. At times Gregory's letters suggest he thought of the Church as one huge parish with himself as parish priest, the bishops, etc., as curates and the lay princes as a sort of churchwarden or leader of Catholic action. It is not true to say that

Gregory simply wanted the Church to be free of lay intervention or rule—it was in fact so in his day to as large a degree as it ever was in the Middle Ages and far more so than it was in the post-Reformation world, in either Catholic or Protestant kingdoms. What Gregory wanted was the subordination of lay rulers to his moral dictatorship, he wanted them to intervene but on his say-so. What the boundaries of the moral were, Gregory would define. As he himself put it: if the Pope were the supreme judge of spiritual causes why not secular? It is evident from his practice that he thought himself properly qualified, both by right and capacity, to decide the rights and wrongs of a bitter political struggle between the German king and a large part of the German princes. His claims that he was doing nothing new or different are not convincing—but I should hope we do not propose to insist on a precedent-bound papacy. It is the mess Gregory made of his interventions that is objectionable: the League of Nations attempting to settle the Italian invasion of Ethiopia or the Great Powers' non-intervention policy in the Spanish Civil War seem to have the same combination of moral confusion and practical impossibility leading inevitably to the plainest injustice in practice.

In fact, in spite of Gregory's fame, and the fact that the more radical party in the Church of his day could not openly repudiate him without abandoning much more ground to the conservatives than they were disposed to do, his original *obiter dicta* were quietly dropped from the programme. The codification of canon law as we are now used to it was one of the achievements of the Gregorian reformation but the papal law thus preserved and transmitted includes very little of Gregory's original thoughts. It makes more sense to look at the ideology of which Gregory was the exponent and to see why it took the shape it did and why, what is indisputable, the best minds of the Church all accepted it in some degree up to Gregory's pontificate. It is certainly true that this ideology shaped the hierarchical Church, with the Pope at its head as universal ordinary, elected by a college of cardinals, and the ultimate source of law as the ultimate court of appeal. It is under the influence of this way of thinking that popes decided they could hold General Councils, which were general because the Pope said they were, not because they were attended by all or most of the bishops—they were not. It is from these councils that the famous doctrine of transubstantiation derives. It is from the direction of this kind of churchman that the kind of sacramental devotions associated with the celebration of Corpus Christi at one level and Benediction at another obtained. It is, again, this party and the papal members of it, who sought—and in the end successfully—to make clerical celibacy, not a counsel of perfection to be encouraged by offering clerical donkeys spiritual carrots, as with Gregory the Great, but a rule of discipline to be observed, or else. In a word these 'reformers' created what Catholic Marxists like to call the feudal papacy. It therefore behoves us to look fairly carefully at the relationship between the new model papacy and the existing social structure. If I may anticipate my main conclusion, to call the papacy of the high middle ages

feudal, is to add to confusion. It was as anti-feudal as it could get away with being, in a world which itself can only be called feudal if we read the shape of that society from what the law books said it was, instead of looking at political and economic reality.

Up to a point the political society of the tenth and eleventh centuries was as it had been in the days of Gregory the Great, dominated by a comparatively few great families. We still have much to find out about contemporary social structure. Plainly there was an upper 'class' of great wealth and power, a peasantry whose labour supported the economy, and a collection of small warriors, or lesser warriors, also landholding, who can be called a 'middle-class' if one wants to be thoroughly misleading. Just before the war Marc Bloch asked the key question: is the status distance between these three classes roughly as we might suppose from our experience of their modern equivalents? We know now the answer is no. The famous pyramidal model of society, with the king at top, owning all the land in the country, then the barons, lay and spiritual (bishops and abbots in another guise), then the knights, and lastly the peasants, all held together by the public ceremonies of homage and fealty—a sort of wedding ceremony declaring social and economic, not sexual intent—is a product of the feudal law books not of a proper study of feudal society. It has been pointed out that the medieval countryside looked, socially, much more like a few high-rise buildings, surrounded by small dwellings of varying size but sharing a relative insignificance, than a pyramid. The great men, who were really rich in land and other possessions were few in number. They are not properly in my opinion called a class at all because they are so few. Even a king of a large country probably knew all his magnates personally: they are in modern sociological jargon, a power élite.

At the other end of society were the peasants who were plainly numerous and poor, most of them must have lived a large part of their lives on the margin of subsistence, some died of starvation and many must have suffered from malnutrition. They formed a social class quite clearly but—and here is an important component of a rational explanation of medieval politics—with little political power or consequence. Dr Johnson once remarked there is a kind of poverty which induces a social inertia and indifference to anything except scratching a living. Over most of the middle ages this seems to have been true of the peasantry. There are exceptions, notably the fourteenth century, and it is clear that the Viking invasions in England at least gave opportunities for some unwonted social mobility. Archbishop Wulfstan complains that thralls are running off, joining the Vikings, and returning to enslave their former masters. Half a century earlier King Aethelstan provided for posses to round up gangs of runaway slaves (when caught the ringleaders were hanged and the rest scalped—you will not find this aspect of early English society in the *Oxford History of England* but it is in the sources all the same). There are also curious criticisms made of the monastic reformers of the tenth century, by one of the few literate conservatives, Bishop Adalbero of Lâon, of preach-

ing a doctrine of social revolution. This may be no more than the *Manchester Leader's* suspicions of Richard Nixon as a dangerous Communist but there is a little (not very solid) evidence that there was something in it. At any rate the reformers' influence on English law, law which seems to have been enforced, provided for compulsory rest from work on some forty specified saints' days: whatever their motives this must in practice have ameliorated working conditions. But by and large this rural proletariat were without the means or the resources to influence politics other than spasmodically. It is the 'middle' class, the smaller warrior-landholding class that really complicates the picture.

This class, again cannot have been numerous though we cannot count them and would meet problems of definition of categories if we tried. They are not homogeneous, or not very. What they had in common was a certain security on the right side of the subsistence line. Some of them must otherwise have been very poor, and one can guess some of their families could sink downwards, as a few certainly moved upwards. A few of them had sufficient land and social consequence to move on the fringe of the magnate group but the bulk of them were more like small-holders, with inferior peasants to run the farming side, and military expertise at the service of their own lord. It is certain that this group, again they are hardly a social class in any strict sense, were individually of little consequence. They were perhaps nearer the peasant in style of life, with certain exceptions, than the magnate. But as a group they were powerful. They certainly acquired the legal right to bequeath their landed estates before the magnates did. They secured a fixed rate of death duty when the magnate was at the mercy of arbitrary amounts levied at the will of the king, sometimes amounting to massive sums. Although magnatial families normally maintained their status at a certain minimum level from generation to generation, often enough there was enormous variation in that level from one generation to another. The right to participate in high politics involved difficulties and was expensive, the power to create family dynasties that would endure and wax over the generations was not often forthcoming. In England the oldest families tend to be of what I have called 'middle class', knightly origin. The Percys are a good example, and the Berkleys who were rich and important in the days of Edward the Confessor a solitary exception. Modern great families, like the Russells, are of comparatively recent origin (the Russells descend from a family of cheating tradesmen in late medieval East Anglia), really old families like the Stonors have survived by doing nothing except survive for generations.

The reasons for this curious and apparently anomalous class behaviour are not hard to find. It is mainly a matter of the smallness of the groups involved. In the tenth century the presence or absence of fifty knights could turn a decisive battle. The magnate had no means of making sure his knights would turn up for a battle, even if he alone had the right to choose on which side to participate, though if they stayed away and guessed wrong about the result he had power to chase

them to no uncertain purpose. This is why it was easy for knights as a group to exert pressure, or comparatively easy. Magnates could not transform the status distance between them and their knights—which was immense—into an equivalent power of social coercion at will. In England—where my examples of the superior political success of the knights as a group came from—after 1066 for various reasons the Crown forbade knights to fight for their lords against the King of the day and got away with it. This was probably the most striking example of the kind of a political set up that resulted from this curious social structure. The Crown had a tacit alliance with the smaller landholders and until 1215 (when the magnates discovered the power they had if they combined as a group and behaved like knights rather than grandees too proud and powerful to make combinations of the nature of a political party), the knights as group did much better than the magnates. It would be reasonable in these circumstances to think of knights and magnates as forming a single landholding social class, but divided into two power-élites with great differences in wealth and status that prevented them from acting as a single class politically when it mattered.

This needs to be born in mind when we look at the antics of the reform party in the Church, which certainly had a policy for kings, magnates, and knights. It looks very much as though the creators of that policy, most notably St Odo of Cluny, had grasped the social structure of their day, and trimmed their policies accordingly. These reformers were for the most part, especially the tenth century monks, very political animals, and some part of their success was due precisely to this. I do not mean they were politicians using religious means, I mean they were precisely the reverse. Nowadays the academic right have an ideology that no one ever seeks office to put policies into power, but invents policies to gain office. As a corollary there is no great moral difference between politicians, only success or failure. Hence A. J. P. Taylor's version of Hitler as merely a successful politician where Chamberlain and Daladier were merely unsuccessful. (It is revealing of the limitations of this kind of rubbish that Mr Taylor has to assure us that it was deplorable to send so many Jews to the gas chambers.) On a more mundane level Mr Skidelsky has recently presented us with an Oswald Mosely who was simply an unluckier version of Stanley Baldwin. He was never anti-semitic—at least not at his dinner table, only on soap boxes in the East End of London. This is a load of hogwash and at least a study of the tenth century will show how little it will work.

Most of the original reformers were men of the highest social group, of great family who owed their starts at least to their aristocratic connexions. St Dunstan, for instance, was a member of the royal family, and although reformers such as Dunstan paid more than lip-service to their belief in a Church in which preferment went by merit alone and although some men much lower down in the social scale than usual reached the episcopate owing promotion to their influence and protection, most bishops were necessarily drawn from the highest

social class. St Æthelred, bishop of Winchester and archbishop of Canterbury, was of the low middle class status group but, spotted by Dunstan, he was promoted over Dunstan's own relatives and own kind. But given the kind of social structure I have outlined such cases must have been few, just because the kind of education and consequent literacy necessary, were so difficult to provide as well as to get that they tended to become a status symbol for the highest social groups. Why, however, we know that these reformers were not simply scheming politicians after the highest places of the Church is simply that few of them got anything they could not have got by ordinary means with much less discomfort. Dunstan was exactly the sort of man who must have reached the top anyway. His adherence to the reformed cause earned him two sentences of exile and a beating up before he became first bishop then archbishop. Abbot Abbo of Fleury in the next generation was abbot of one of the most prestigious monasteries in France (St Benedict's reputed bones and a close connexion with the new royal dynasty of Western Francia as well as extensive estates accounted for the prestige); but this did not prevent his murder by recalcitrant monks resisting reformation. Viewed as career prospects in the tenth century, monastic reform might lead to high places in the Church for those who could have expected these anyway, but it was likely to have entailed exile, privation, and physical manhandling on the route. It also certainly entailed a very different way of life. However powerful a man's family was he had to accept the reformer's style of life, if he wanted acceptance into their circle. That meant a renunciation of the pleasures of sex and gluttony. (In this kind of world conspicuous consumption of food was an obvious status symbol and explains why concern about the distribution of food from high tables was important to hagiographers.) The evidence is plentiful that unreformed religious life did not entail any such renunciation. In the ninth century Alcuin conjures up a picture of monastic life at Lindisfarne with the 'monks' in their little houses holding wild parties and gambling. If Peter Damian's *Liber Gomorrhianus*, from the middle of the eleventh century, is based on observation and clerical confessions, the unreformed North Italian clergy of his day would find Soho more congenial than Archbishop's House. It will not do, then, to point to family connexions of the reformers and suppose them hypocrites. In their world kith and kin were what stocks, shares, and dividends are in our world. It would be silly to castigate a modern critic of the system for having a bank account and credit card: if he also had a Cadillac, a villa in Torremolinos, and a taste for Bond Street girls, that would be different. The tenth century reformers could not help living in a world made of families but as far as they could subvert it they did: its fleshpots they resisted.

To see what I mean by subvert we must look for a moment at what was at stake. Most of these families held inherited rights over the patronage of churches. Most famous were the Crescentii family of Central Italy, and the Tusculanis who succeeded them, who had the papacy in their gift for something like a century and a half (and never

gave it out of the family). These families did not exercise this patronage simply out of tradition and bloodmindedness. In his famous book *The Making of the Middle Ages*, Mr R. W. Southern has illuminated the state of the unreformed Catalan Church in some justly famous pages. He quotes Sir Thomas Bertram's rebuke to his elder son, when the living which is to support the younger son in life has to be 'leased out to pay the elder son's debts. But, with respect, the unreformed Church especially the Catalan branch, was not really very like *Mansfield Park*. The curious will find a much less diverting but rather more detailed account in A. R. Lewis, *Development of Southern France and Catalonia*. These Catalan and Southern French dioceses carried with them important estates particularly fortified castles. In an age when a lord could levy only limited military service from his vassals, limited to a few weeks per year—unless he could hire supplements, which few had the ready money to do—and without explosives, it was terribly difficult to take castles. They were an enormously efficient form of defence. A great Catalan family like the counts of Cerdana could not afford to accede to the reformers' demands that they allow the episcopal sees in their gift or the abbey free elections, because on the nod of the bishop or abbot-elect depended the disposal and allegiance of the castles. By and large the reformers knew this perfectly well but they did not let it hinder them.

Some of these castles were the key to reform. It was not enough to put in a bishop, who had been a model monk in a reformed monastery. He had to purge his chapter, replace as many as possible with other reformed and literate monks, or force those left to abandon their women and adopt plain living even if they could not rise to very high thinking. This must have offended the pride and the pockets of the local great. Many of the ejected clerks were their kin and their social responsibility. If they conformed, if their women had been regular wives as some of them certainly were with children, they fell back on the family for support. The reform party always expropriated and never compensated if it could help, if the English evidence is anything to go by. Sometimes there was a castle in the cathedral city. Reform was never secure until the castle was destroyed or better still in the hands of a reformed bishop. At Liège the castle was got by stratagem, at Cambrai, where we have only the reformers' version to go by, it certainly looks as though it was got by pretty foul means. At Mende in the Gevaudan—whence we get a hilarious account of the problems a bishop at odds with the local establishment was likely to encounter—the Bishop settled his enemies by pretending his diocese was part of the French kingdom. Greatest of all, the decisive moment in the history of the reform of the papacy was that in which the Normans from Southern Italy secured the Castell' Sant'Angelo for the papacy. From now on Rome was the reformers' city and the disappearance from history of the former 'protectors' of the papal property, the Crescentii and Tusculani, shows how ruthless the reformers could be.

Once the cathedral city was secured the reforming bishop was home and dry. He could choose his chapter as he would. Usually a semi-

monastic rule—in England the Rule of St Benedict himself—was imposed and in some cases, as at Liège we know that the income saved, because plain living celibates cost much less than canons *moyen sensuel* enabled the size of the chapter to be increased. Thus the reform of that Church was self-perpetuating.

Even before the reformers had won the see of Rome and could put their policy through with all the power of the tradition of Peter, the reformers had won a remarkable degree of success, when one considers the degree of political consequence reform was likely to have. Up to a point this was done by a multiplicity of means. Some of these means were ideological, an astute manipulation of the terrors of Hell for instance, which I shall discuss in my next article, others simply whatever lay to hand. In a sense it is true that there were as many policies as there were churches with a reformed party to fight for. But the process of change would have been slower without one particular, political, means.

Reform was rapidest where royal power was strongest. Most kings, until Gregory VII taught them there was an unacceptable price to pay for uninhibited support of reform, were reformers. Never in European history have so many kings—of England, Western and Eastern Francia—exerted themselves so single-mindedly for reform. Some of them were unquestionably personally sympathetic to the reformers' version of Catholicism, some of them like Robert the Pious of Western Francia were never more dangerous politically than when on their knees. But for most the question of sincerity never arose; in the case of the two greatest exponents of what some scholars like to call Caesaro-papism, Otto the Great and King Edgar, self-interest and the promotion of reform went hand in hand. The point is this. The Vikings or the Hungarians, had given to those kingdoms most exposed to their attacks, namely England and Eastern Francia, the choice of adopting much more centralised institutions or going under. Going under meant expropriation, perhaps total, of the landholding class. In England the West Saxon dynasty, now the most ancient in Western Europe, was found acceptable, even desirable by the Mercians who had been fighting a life and death struggle with them for nearly a century. In Eastern Francia in the first years of the tenth century the German magnates would not give the redoubtable Conrad I, a near Carolingian (if not quite a proper one the nearest thing to one they had available) support to be more than a titular king. After the experience of a Hungarian presence they gave to the Liudolfinger family, exalted hicks from the frontier sticks, a loyalty that made Henry I and Otto I the most powerful European rulers since Charlemagne and Louis the Pious.

Now it is true we must not look at English and German history in this period as though it were nothing but a struggle between centralising kings and recalcitrant magnates. After all, for the most part kings married into magnatial families and took full part in the complicated interplay of family alliances and feuds that marked magnatial life at this time. But a king was more than a magnate. If the kingdom was

to survive he had to look at things from a wider point of view than a magnate. He needed policies—the costly and elaborate chain of fortification by which the house of Cerdic in England and Henry I in East Francia contained their perennial enemies are the most striking examples—no magnate could envisage or could pay for if he did. Inevitably containing and repulsing the Vikings and Hungarians gave the crowns of the two kingdoms concerned much greater central power, much greater power to raise money from their subjects, and much greater authority in the neighbourhood. The reforming monks saw this as quickly as it happened and in these kingdoms, and to a lesser extent in Western Francia, they were taken on as allies of ambitious kings. In England in Edgar's short reign they got control over most of the major monasteries and all the sees. They communalised endowments, cut out family influence, ejected tenants they didn't like and made their churches, materially as well as spiritually, power centres isolated from the local secular arrangements and able to command the wealth and the warrior-vassals, to hold their own. In Eastern Francia, Otto the Great coped with the refractory province of Lotharingia—the least troubled by Hungarian invasions in his kingdom—by making his younger brother, a noted reformer, Bruno one of the senior archbishops of the province. The see of Cologne was then made the head of a vast complex of property and vassals autonomous under the Crown, and into the bargain Bruno was made duke of Lotharingia as his brother's vicegerent.

As a result the reformers were forced further into the realm of political theology than they might otherwise have gone. They had to have theological grounds for explaining why it was lawful to fight in battle A whilst anathemising those who fought in battle B. When, as so often, anathemas went to those resisting kings, taking off them what they had some traditional grounds for regarding as their own, they needed a special theology about kingship. Further they could no longer maintain the Church's traditional grudging toleration of the soldier's calling which did not allow any virtue to war: they had accepted violence as a sometimes legitimate means and they needed theological criteria for deciding what were and what were not just wars. They needed, too, to be much clearer about the proper qualifications for distinguishing an ordained person and a theory about the rights and obligation of laymen and clerks. In the process of doing this kind of theology they largely created the idea of the Church that is now breaking up. In my next article I want to describe the sort of theological activity they went in for, at least, in outline. It is as well to remember that much of that theology is no older than the tenth century, that it was created to meet immediate and temporary needs of the New Israel, and may be profitably compared with the period of David and Saul and their successors, who were very much in the minds of the reformers of the period. There is no more reason for supposing Providence meant it to be permanent than was the case with Pius V and his wretched liturgical constitution we hear so much of in the pages of the religious press.