



## 36. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN EMPIRE AND PAPACY

Rivers of ink have been written on the subject we are about to present. Unfortunately, the prejudicial hatred against Tradition, which has since dominated Western thought, has given it a partisan description. Sometimes, in the interpretation of facts, reality has been overturned. For this reason, we will try to offer a traditional revision, which reflects what really happened. As we said in the previous chapter, the restoration of the Latin Church was an initiative of the Empire for the salvation of Christendom. The chosen instrument was the institution of the monastic orders. Until then, monasticism consisted of *cœnobia* and hermitages that were completely autocephalous. The only relationship that the monasteries had with the local bishops concerned the celebration of obligatory rituals, since monks carefully avoided being ordered as secular priests<sup>1</sup>. They therefore resorted to the liturgical services of the priests that the bishops put at their disposal. The relations between monasteries and bishops were based on mutual respect, without the slightest dependency on each other. This respect was strengthened by the fact that the monks almost always were of aristocratic origins, as the monastic life required an inclination for study and contemplation. Likewise, bishops came from the same noble environment that gave guarantees of administrative capacity and cultural preparation.



### 1. The Bishop and Monk

We will remind the reader that a bishop was elected by the prelates of the diocese among the most capable collaborators of his predecessor. To the *placet* (consent) of the bishops of the same district, followed the delivery of the ring and pastoral stick by the very Emperor or by one of his delegates<sup>2</sup>. In some cases, where the bishop's diocese coincided with the extension of a fiefdom, the prelate was also invested with the corresponding feudal benefice. What needs to be remembered is that the monastic initiation continued to be transmitted within the monasteries, even though the function of *guru* did not necessarily correspond to the office of abbot. Similarly, not all monks could become disciples of the *Ars sacerdotalis*<sup>3</sup>, but only the most qualified among them. Moreover, in the feudal system the transmission

<sup>1</sup> If by chance a priest decided to become a monk, his monastery achieved also the ritual autonomy. It has already been explained that when a monk, who was also a priest, was elected abbot by his brothers, he became a mitred abbot, a peer with the bishops, at least from an ecclesiastical perspective.

<sup>2</sup> Until this point, the papal approval was not required in any way. It is also untrue that was the pope who consecrated the bishops. We must not forget that the Pope was recognized as *primus inter pares* (first among equals) simply because he was the bishop of Rome, the capital of the Empire. Similarly, also the Patriarch of Constantinople enjoyed, and still does, this formal recognition as the bishop of the Eastern Empire's capital. Being elected by the prelates of the diocese of Rome, the election of the pope followed the exact same custom of all the other episcopates. Ambrogio M. Piazzoni, *Storia delle elezioni pontificie*, Segrate, Piemme Religio, 2003, pp. 85-117.

<sup>3</sup> This presence of this initiatic path is still included today in sundry monasteries of the Orthodox Church, both Greek and Slavic ones. It is interesting that a similar organization can be found in the monasteries of the Tibetan tantric tradition.



of the warrior initiations was maintained through the institution of the chivalry, which had at its helm the *Imperator*<sup>1</sup>.



## 2. Chivalrous initiation

We have already seen that the Abbey of Cluny, engaged in the rectification of the Roman Church<sup>2</sup>, quickly degenerated in a centre of ecclesiastic-political power. Although less rapidly and under different circumstances, also the Cistercian and Camaldolese branches of monasticism declined, embracing radical forms of pauperism<sup>3</sup> as the result of the influence exercised by the Lombard Pataria<sup>4</sup>.



## 3- Patarine mutiny

Somehow, these social activities<sup>5</sup>, instead of restoring the Roman Church, reformed the Benedictine monasticism, breaking them down into rival currents increasingly involved in secular affairs. The

<sup>1</sup> Not always did the *Imperator*, the head of chivalric initiations, coincide with the person of the Holy Roman Emperor. Certainly, in the period we are discussing there are many indications of the coincidence of the two functions in Otto I, Otto III of Saxony, Conrad II and Henry III of Franconia. It is important to note that Knut, King of Denmark and England, was present at the imperial coronation of Conrad II. King Knut is mentioned in documents with the Latin title of *Imperator*. Now, since the Holy Roman Emperor was obviously Conrad II, with *Imperator* certainly one wanted to recognize Knut's high chivalric-initiatic function. About a century later, King Alfonso VII of Castile was also recognized as *Imperator*, although he never sought the crown of the Holy Roman Empire. We will see how, some centuries later, this title will re-emerge in deviated hermetic circles to define the heads of the various magical-occultist currents.

<sup>2</sup> We remind the reader that the secular clergy, headed by the pope, was entirely profane (*adikṣita*).

<sup>3</sup> Pauperism is a heretical tendency that maintains that indigence was the main Christian virtue in the teachings of Jesus. In fact, it can be verified that Jesus never assumed a poor lifestyle. Not even once the New Testament affirms the necessity of leading a life in poverty to obtain salvation. Misery is always presented as an object of compassion, but it is never recommended as a condition to be assumed, except during periods of ascesis and penitence.

<sup>4</sup> A parareligious heretical movement of the 11th century, originated in the Milan area among the poorest social strata (patarine = derelict), in open rebellion against the archbishop, the nobility and the "wealthy" of the city of Milan. (A. Zorzi, *Manual of Medieval History*, cit., pp.173-174)

<sup>5</sup> Until that time, becoming a monk meant giving up the world. The monasteries were built in inaccessible places, far from cities and roads. Therefore, this new social activity forever upset Latin monasticism, thus contributing to the obscuring of the contemplative and initiatic presence.



exteriorization of monasticism backed the worldly ambitions of the papacy and deprived the Empire of its spiritual support. For its part, the Church of Rome, initially hostile to the Pataria, was able to take advantage of the discontent of the lower classes and to unleash them against the Milanese nobility and against the archbishop himself tied to loyalty to the Empire<sup>1</sup>.

The Emperor, like his homologous the *Basileus*, for centuries enjoyed the title of *Vicarius Christi*, successor of the Messiah-King<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the Emperor owed his sacred authority to the transmission of the Roman initiatic function of the *Imperator*. Thanks to this dual charisma he was *Rex et Sacerdos*, spiritually equated to the bishops. Only Jesus Christ and the Emperor could be portrayed holding the globe of the world in their hands. With Otto I was introduced the practice of the anointing of the Emperor by the pope, a ritual for the coronation of the Kings of France that dates back to the time of Meroveus. Otto accepted with pleasure this modification of the imperial consecration, which made him also successor of the biblical Kings David and Solomon. The Emperor did not realize the trap that had been laid for him. With the rite of anointing he was lowered to a dignity equal to that of the King of France. Furthermore, with the impersonation of David, the biblical King of the Jews, he was implicitly recognizing the supremacy of the priests over the sovereign who was anointed by them<sup>3</sup>.

Later, both the King of France and the Norman King of England<sup>4</sup> began to support the doctrine that the King was like the Emperor in his Kingdom. It was a declaration of independence from the Universal Sovereign and constituted the first crack in the Christian ecumene. Also, in this case, the pope took the side of the national Kings, knowing that in this way the uniqueness of the Holy Emperor was undermined. Thus, the Emperor became one of the many Kings, losing his prestige as the only defender of Christianity and the sole successor of Christ.



#### 4. Bishops and Cardinals (with red hat)

<sup>1</sup> “No other pope has ever been able to mobilize “the street” again like Gregory VII did. The popular fury that was unleashed in Milan in the form of hatred for the high and rich clergy [...] marks the explosion of a widespread latent anticlericalism ... “(F. Herr, *The Holy Roman Empire*, cit., p. 72).

<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the pope was considered *Vicarius Petri* (Saint Peter’s deputy), and as such he was subordinate to him (Glaucio Cantarella, *Il Papa e il Sovrano*, Bergamo, Europa, 1998, pp. 30-31). For this reason, after the rite of the imperial coronation, the pope prostrated himself before the Emperor (*proskynesis*).

<sup>3</sup> In ancient Israel, the Kings came from the tribe of Judah, inferior in dignity to the tribe of Levi from which the *Cohanim* (priests) came from.

<sup>4</sup> In 1066, following the victory at Hastings, the Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror, took possession of all England and proclaimed himself King. The Normans lorded the island by reducing the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes in a shameful state of slavery. Wherever they arrived, these barbarians shook the traditions and the social order. The alliance between the papacy and the Normans in southern Italy was finally sealed in 1130 when the Pope crowned Roger II as King of Sicily. This was the first reign that formally acknowledged vassalage to the papacy, which thus usurped the temporal power of the Empire.



In 1059, with the *Decretum in electione papæ*, Pope Nicholas II changed the rules for electing a new pope<sup>1</sup>. The cardinals<sup>2</sup>, who were directly appointed by the pope, became the only ones to have the privilege of electing the pope through a conclave.

The papacy then waged a subterranean struggle against the high clergy by inciting the lowest classes against them. Leveraging on social envy, the Roman papal court accused the high prelates of two sins: the first, called ‘simony’, consisted in the purchase of ecclesiastical offices in exchange for money or favours<sup>3</sup>. The second sin (defined ‘nicolaitism’) consisted in the marriage or the concubinage of the prelates. Pope Leo IX (1049-1054), therefore, definitively decreed that the celibacy of priests had to be obligatory<sup>4</sup>.

Leo IX also declared that the pope was no longer to be considered as a simple *primus inter pares*. The Pope became then the absolute leader of all the bishops, including the patriarchs of the Eastern Empire. His power was unquestionable, and thus he unilaterally assumed the authority to appoint bishops. This claim split Christianity in two, beyond repair<sup>5</sup>. The Church of Constantinople rejected these conditions, resulting with its excommunication by the bishop of Rome. The patriarch of Byzantium replied then with an equal excommunication. Since then the two Churches have never come back together. More than the very minimal doctrinal differences it was the claims of political supremacy of the pope that caused what is known as the “Great Schism”.



## 5. Schism between Catholics and Orthodox

All these upheavals of the Christian tradition were carried out patiently, in a sneaky and hypocritical way. The Roman curia, however, was always ready to abandon every claim in case of necessity, as it was in the case when Henry III deposed the three popes contending for the see of Peter and appointed one of his choice. No one, then, had anything to object.

<sup>1</sup> M. Montanari, *Storia medievale, cit.*, p. 138-139.

<sup>2</sup> Until then, cardinals were those bishops, priests or simple lay people who performed auxiliary functions at the papal court. With this reform, which upset the structure of the Catholic Church, they became more important than the bishops themselves. From then until today, every pope has appointed his own followers in order to influence the election of his successor. In 1970 it was decided that the elective power of the cardinals expires at the age of eighty. In this way the cardinals loyal to the previous pope are excluded from the elective right.

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, also the oath of feudal loyalty to the Emperor in return for the *beneficium* was considered simony.

<sup>4</sup> From the early centuries, celibacy and chastity were required only from monks. These virtues were part of the renunciation of the world. The obligation of celibacy for simple secular priests, apparently only a moralizing measure, had instead institutional ends; that is to say, to avoid the possible formation of a priestly caste in the Catholic tradition. Differently, the Orthodox Church has never imposed celibacy on its priests. It is recommended only for the high clergy as an added virtue. In the Orthodox world there are many prominent families who for many centuries have provided high priests, theologians, hermits and saints to their Church. On the contrary, in the Catholic Church, the tendency over the centuries mostly consisted in recruiting the clergy from the lower strata; a trend that today has reached the bottom of the social hierarchy.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, not even the Catholic bishops willingly accepted the papal claims. Above all, the bishops of Germany and northern Italy continued to ignore these novelties for at least a century. Against the bishops of northern Italy, the popes unleashed the Pataria in the squares and streets of their cities, while accusing the German bishops, largely of imperial nomination, of simony for being consecrated as such in exchange for their “subjugation” to the Emperor.



The ambitions of the bishops of Rome, however, shamelessly emerged when Hildebrand of Sovana became pope under the name of Gregory VII (1073-1085). Born of a peasant family, he quickly pursued his ecclesiastical career thanks to the financial help received from his maternal uncle, the moneylender Leo Baruch<sup>1</sup>. Scheming as a priest and pretending to be a monk<sup>2</sup>, he became the master puppeteer behind five popes before becoming pope himself with an irregular acclamation by the Roman populace influenced by the Pataria. Motivated by a hatred of the Empire, he deviously masterminded for forty years a network of alliances and underhand dealings<sup>3</sup>, coming to an agreement with the Patarines, with the Kings of France and England and, above all, with the Normans of southern Italy.



## 6. Gregory VII (Hildebrand of Sovana)

This man possessed such a malicious inclination for subterfuge and hubris that even his contemporaries recognized his traits as “luciferin”<sup>4</sup>. Taking advantage of the young age of Henry III’s successor to the throne of Germany, he fomented the rivalry first among the great feudal Lords, then among the feudatory prelates and, finally, between all these and the vacant Imperial throne<sup>5</sup>.



## 7. The donkey instructs the priests

<sup>1</sup> Unsurprisingly, this pope is remembered by historians for his ruthless fight against simony! (Paolo Brezzi, *Roma e l'impero medioevale (774-1252)*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1947 (Istituto di Studi Romani, Storia di Roma, X), *praes.* pp. 205 ss. In this source, however, the Vatican claim that Hildebrand of Sovana was a descendant of the Aldobrandeschi Counts is entirely refuted.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory stayed at the Cluny monastery as a guest only for a few days. From that moment on he declared to be a Cluniac monk.

<sup>3</sup> His hatred also extended to the Byzantines, whom he fought actively, siding with the Normans. The main reason was not, as one may expect, for being “orthodox schismatics”, but rather because they were “imperial” in their spirit. “Gregory VII devoted himself ferociously to this cause, which in turn triggered nothing but tremendous unrest. He spread more hatred in Europe than any other ruler...” (F. Heer, *Il Sacro Romano Impero, cit.*, P.79)

<sup>4</sup> “Moreover, to prevent that monk of the synagogue of Satan [Gregory VII] from escaping the judgment of the Roman laws, which are wholly opposed to him, [...] I am sending to Your Magnificence the book where the Blessed Gregory [i.e. pope Gregory I the Great (590-604)] collected both civil and ecclesiastical laws, which he used in the Holy Church. “(“Letter from Petrus Crassus to King Henry”, G. Cantarella, *Il Papa e il Sovrano, cit.*, page 91)

<sup>5</sup> Among the schemers who took advantage of that situation, unscrupulously expanding their power to the disadvantage of others, we mention the Marquises of Canossa and Dukes of Lotharingia and the archbishops of Hamburg, Bremen and Cologne. The latter, Anno II, dared to kidnap the twelve-year-old Henry IV usurping the regency of the Germany’s Kingdom for several years. Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz, Year II, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon (BBKL)*, Band 1, Hamm 1975, columns 179-180.



He published a *Dictatus Papae* in which he declared that the Emperor was a simple layman and that he had no priestly power. Moreover, only the Pope was the true *Vicarius Christi* with supreme authority over all the sovereigns and bishops of the world. In addition, only the pope had the power to consecrate the bishops<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, only the priests, regardless of their rank, had the power to perform rites. This made the clergy the only intermediary between God and the rest of humanity<sup>2</sup>. Thus, by re-evaluating the functions of the lower clergy, the Pope succeeded in reducing the authority of the other bishops to his advantage. Gregory VII also declared that the pope had the power to release the subjects from the oath of loyalty to their Lords. The results of this will be fatal for the feudal system that was based on loyalty, fidelity and honour.



#### 8. Henry IV humbling himself before Gregory VII and Matilda of Canossa

When Henry IV, the twenty-six years old *Rex Romanorum* (i.e. King of Italy), intervened to validate the election of the archbishop of Milan, Gregory excommunicated him and declared him lapsed for having interfered in the affairs of the clergy. This was the first time that a bishop applied excommunication as a political weapon. Since the pope had morally justified disloyalty, many German feudal Lords, especially Cluny-influenced clergymen, rebelled against their sovereign. Henry IV was practically forced to humble himself by going as a pilgrim to ask the pope for pardon<sup>3</sup>.



#### 9. Tiara with a cown (Innocent III), with two crowns (Boniface VIII), with three crowns (Benedict XII)

Obtained the forgiveness, Henry struck the rebellion of his untrustworthy vassals and regained control of the Empire. However, the humiliation of the sovereign remained as a disgraceful precedent. The Pope

<sup>1</sup> This reform was not immediately accepted by the other bishops, archbishops and patriarchs who, for many decades, continued to receive the election in their diocese, with the subsequent confirmation by Emperor.

<sup>2</sup> This declaration is of extreme gravity because it denies not only the efficacy, but also the very existence of other rituals, such as the initiatic ones. From this historical period onwards, the Catholic Church assumed an increasingly hostile attitude towards the initiatic traditions.

<sup>3</sup> The Marquis of Canossa' scheming widow played a blackmail role in that affair, obtaining in return an expansion of her fiefdom.



excommunicated him again, but this time the Emperor replied by besieging Rome. The Pope then requested the help of his Norman allies. These put Rome on fire and then retreated to their lands dragging the Pope along with them. Prisoner of his treacherous friends, Gregory VII eventually suffered a miserable death. However, an irreparable damage had already been done, and their effects would later manifest themselves in all their harmfulness for the medieval ecumene. By accusing the Emperor of taking possession of priestly prerogatives, the pope in fact usurped the temporal power without reservation <sup>1</sup>.

*Petrus Simonet de Maisonneuve*

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<sup>1</sup> To usurp the three imperial crowns, i.e. of the Kingdom of Germany, the Kingdom of Italy (or of the Romans) and the Kingdom of Provence, the popes assumed the tiara or “papal crown”. At first the tiara was adorned by a single crown; then by two crowns, finally by three crowns or *triregnum*. During the period in question, the popes replaced the horse with the donkey as their usual mount (Agostino Paravicini Bagliani *Il bestiario del Papa*, Collana Saggi, Torino, Einaudi). Was this, perhaps, a symbolic reappearance of Seth, the cursed God, consistently immanent in the bowels of monotheism? It is no coincidence that a hideous pope like Gregory VII is now object of admiration and praise by historians and considered a revolutionary and enlightened progressist.