



38. THE DELETERIOUS RESULTS OF THE CHURCH'S SECULARIZATION

The serious disturbances of the Imperial Ecumene caused by the reckless reforms of Catholicism promoted by the popes of the 11th century caused unpredictable consequences.

These are the protagonists of such ruin: the popes of the early 11th century were largely puppets or exponents of the Counts of Tusculum family. Of plebeian origins, they intermarried with the rival Roman patrician family of the Crescencii, becoming increasingly influential in Rome. They became the schemers behind the papal election and the dismissal of the imperial popes. Sergius IV, born Boccadiporco (i.e. Pig Snout!) (1009-1012), son of a cobbler, was the first of the long list of popes imposed by the Tusculum; Benedict VIII, Count of Tusculum (1012-1024), was the first reformer of the Church in a secular sense; John XIX (1024-1032), Count of Tusculum, passed into history for his concession of religious favours in exchange for money (sin of simony) in benefit of his own family; Benedict IX, Count of Tusculum, was pope three times (1033-1044; 1045; 1047-1048).



1. Pope Benedict IX

He bought and sold the papal throne, until he was deposed. Saint Peter Damian said of him: "wallowing in immorality, a devil from Hell disguised as a priest, [...] an apostle of the Antichrist, arrow from the quiver of Satan, rod of Asur, son of Belial, stench of the world, shame of humanity." Sylvester III (1045), of the patrician Crescencii family, reigned only three months; Gregory IV (1045-1046), uncle of Benedict IX, bought the papal throne from his nephew for 2000 liras. After collecting, Benedict requested back the papal charge. Gregory was a pious and naive man who called at his side the diabolical Hildebrand of Sovana, beginning in this way his climb to the papal throne; Clement II (1046-1047), Lord of Morsleben and Hornburg, was elected pope to rescue Rome from the evil influence of the Counts of Tusculum. Faithful to the imperial ideal, he was poisoned by order of Benedict IX. He was succeeded by Damasus II (1047-1048), of the de'Curagnoni family of Brixen, a pro-Imperial pope, who was probably poisoned by Hildebrand of Sovana by order of Benedict IX. Leo IX (1049-1054), Count of Egisheim-Dagsburg, was elected with the Imperial support. Initially he tried to correct the grave faults of his predecessors: he promoted the collaboration of the two greatest powers of Catholicism, the Church and the Empire. He approached the Eastern Empire to reconstitute the increasingly divided solidarity of Romanity. He tried to contain the rising of the Normans, unscrupulous barbarians who had settled on the southern borders of the Patrimony of Saint Peter. However, he soon suffered the influence of Hildebrand of Sovana, betraying the Imperial ideal, excommunicating the Orthodox Church causing the schism, allying himself with the Normans and favouring the new nationalisms of the kingdoms of France and England against the Empire. Victor II



(1054-1057), Count of Calw, Dollnstein and Hirschberg, initially committed to remedy the serious damage caused by his predecessor, soon fell under the manipulative sway of Hildebrand of Sovana who induced him to continue in the anti-Imperial programme of his predecessors, leaning on the Normans, on the Canossa and on other rebel feudatories. Stephen IX (1057-1058), of the House of Gozzelon, dukes of Lorraine, was the last pope who tried to re-establish the unity of Catholicism and the Holy Roman Empire, to resume the relations with the Greek Church and to expel the Normans from southern Italy. He tried to remove Hildebrand of Sovana from the papal court, but his sudden and suspicious death thwarted the realization of his project. Nicholas II (1058-1061), a Cluniac monk, used Saint Peter Damian to remove the ancient prerogatives of independence from the archbishop of Milan by leaning on the Pataria. He supinely followed the advice of Hildebrand of Sovana, investing the Norman chiefs of the Italian fiefdoms in exchange for their vassalage and military support. Alexander II (1061-1073), also a Cluniac monk and a creature of Hildebrand of Sovana, became pope despite the Imperial veto. All his activity was characterized by a fierce struggle against the Holy Roman Empire. To this aim, he even tried to ally himself with the Byzantine *basileus* to deny any legitimacy of Roman succession to the Western Emperor. His successor was the infernal Hildebrand of Sovana, "Saint" Gregory VII (1073-1085); who has already been presented in these pages.



2. The Pope and the Emperor

It should be noted that the Catholic Church continues to consider such series of scoundrels as legitimate popes, punctuated only by two or three respectable personalities who, however, were soon eliminated¹.

It can be said that the distortion of the modern world in the West began there and spread worldwide. We would like to concisely list the immediate and mediated effects of the Latin Catholicism reforms:

1. The Roman Church opposed the Empire by claiming its supremacy over the temporal power of the West. Contrary to the sacral ideal of the Holy Roman Empire which was ruling Christianity in the name of God, the Church undertook a profane political activity in order to affirm the system of power of the Pope-King².
2. While the Empire maintained a fundamentally initiatory structure, still connected to the esoteric knightly ways that continued to be transmitted in the ambit of Latin Catholicism, the Church took on an increasingly worldly and anti-initiatory orientation. If the Holy Roman Emperor continued to be initiated into the mysteries of chivalry, sometimes even identifying himself with the esoteric

¹ (Carlo Rendina, *I Papi*, Roma, Newton Compton, 1983, pp. 359-394).

² Massimo Montanari, *Storia Medievale*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002, p. 140.





function of the *Imperator*, the popes came less and less from the ranks of monasticism. The only monks who had become popes proceeded from the reformed Benedictine Order of Cluny, which had already abandoned contemplation to devote itself to active politics. The Empire was based on an orderly hierarchical conception, very similar to the Indian caste system, according to which both religion and temporal power had to be administered by the *optimates* (aristocrats). On the contrary, the Church of the XI century favoured the social ascent within its ecclesiastical hierarchy of the lower social classes or of the felon members of the false nobility¹. With the passage of time, the Roman Church assumed an increasingly hostile attitude towards esotericism, which will degenerate, as we shall see in the continuation of our excursus, in the most violent persecution.

3. Perhaps the most serious consequence of the 11th century's reforms has been the secularization of monasticism and the progressive disappearance of the contemplative Hesychast initiation from the Latin Catholicism. As we already wrote, it still survives in the Orthodox Church. It should also be remembered that the Normans, who had invaded Southern Italy, carried out in that area a real hunt of the Hesychast with the pontifical blessing². To the deviation and loss of initiation in the Cluniac Order corresponded the degeneration of the ideal of poverty in the remaining currents of the Benedictine Order. As always happens, the "search for the original evangelical purity" has only led to spiritually poor results with the overestimation of moralism. Thus if, for example, the reformed Cistercian Benedictine Order declined from its contemplative purpose more slowly than the rapid deviation of Cluny, there is, however, no doubt that the latter was seriously infected by the heretic and anti-religious movement of the Pataria. Therefore, it can be noted that the Cluniac monks abandoned contemplation and the initiatory inclination to mingle with the politics of the mighty, especially with the popes of Rome, the King of France and the Norman dukes, later Kings. On the contrary, the Cistercian monks left their hermitages to preach to the populace against the wealth, power of the oppressive aristocrats and the high clergy. Thus, even the Cistercians in the course of a couple of centuries eventually turned their backs on initiation.



3. Cluniac and Cistercian monks

Once this was abandoned, the monks subordinated themselves to the popes and bishops, losing their true *raison d'être* and becoming instrumental to the social activities of the secular clergy.

4. The secularized Roman Church supported the policy pursued by the monastery of Cluny. It declared that the temporal power of the Emperor was not of sacred origin, but purely secular. In this way, all

¹ The same Hildebrand of Sovana, son of a peasant, spread the word of being a scion of the ancient patrician Aldobrandeschi family.

² On the Norman persecution in southern Italy see: <https://www.vedavyasamandala.com/37-catholicism-and-orthodoxy-the-di>
: about Barlaam Calabro see: <https://www.vedavyasamandala.com/initiation-and-method-of-hesychasm>.





feudal lords who had obtained their authority from the Empire, Kings, Princes, Dukes, Counts or Barons, were also simple lay people. By removing any sacred acknowledgment, the subordinates of every order and degree were empowered to rebel against their superiors and break their oaths of loyalty. Thus, the authoritativeness of nobles, patricians and knights resulting from the warrior initiation which was the source of their acknowledged power, was completely disregarded. Later on, however, the popes corrected their plan of secularization of the function of the Kings. They realized that the national Sovereigns like the Kings of France, of England, of Castile, of Leon, of Hungary and so on, sought to make themselves independent from the universal Catholic Empire. Thus, while maintaining the dispute over the sacredness of the Holy Roman Emperor, they recognized that a King, in his own Kingdom, draws his power directly from God. In this way, the national Kings became the faithful vassals of the popes for anti-Imperial purposes¹. Later the Roman Church proclaimed France "the Church's firstborn daughter", subtracting this prerogative from the Empire². This was the same France that later would have forced the popes to the Avignon captivity and that would have humiliated the papal "legists" of Bologna with their lawyers from the Sorbonne to demonstrate its total autonomy from the Church in virtue of the "anointing" of Reims that made the King depend directly on God only³.

5. The papacy supported and encouraged paupers' movements, relying on the social envy of the lowest strata of the urban population. Particularly, it used the Pataria to destabilize the social order of the cities governed by the patriciate of Roman origin and by the bishops who had made the cities the administrative centres of their dioceses. The ancient rural patrician *villae*, preserving centres of the Roman tradition, had developed in villages with the progressive aggregation of artisans and merchants, becoming venues of markets, palaces of justice and militias to protect from external foes and to maintain the internal order. The villages that developed and became important nodes along the ancient Roman road network were promoted to cities by Imperial decree or by the great feudal lords.



4. Bellinzona. Hall of the Patrician Council

Based on the model of the Roman Senate, the city was administered by a patrician council (if made only of patricians) or a noble council (if the representatives of the feudal aristocracy residing in the city also participated). In the centre of the city were built the Palace of the Lords and the cathedral, that is the church of a bishop (or archbishop or patriarch). The episcopal chapter was represented in

¹ Nevertheless, the prestige of the Empire sacredness did not induce the rulers to aspire to the imperial throne, advancing their candidacy until that Institution was not suppressed by Napoleon in 1806.

² It is often read that this title had been attributed to France to the conversion of Clovis. In reality it is a manipulated news since at that time there was no territory called France. It appears for the first time at the time of Pepin the Short, when Gaul was now called Francia, so, in principle, it would have been a title to designate the Empire. However, the Holy Roman Empire never adorned the title which implied a subordination to the papacy. In any case, the formula "the eldest daughter of the Church" was historically used for the first time by Sixtus V in 1576 to designate the Kingdom of France during the civil war unleashed by the Holy League account King Henry III.

³ Jacques Le Goff, *Il re nell'Occidente medievale*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2006, pp. 5-10.





the council. Each bishop based his autonomy from Rome on their faithful citizens and was traditionally elected by the chapter with the approval of the council, the acclamation of the people and the Imperial *placet*. The city also reflected the feudal order in an oligarchic rather than a monarchical form and, as a result, it swore allegiance to the vassal on whom it depended or directly to the Emperor. By unleashing envy and jealousy in the lower strata of the population, which befittingly did not enjoy citizenship rights¹, the Church became responsible for acts of “spontaneous” violence. The aim was to remove the rule of the city from the urban nobility, thus to eliminate its loyalty to the Holy Roman Emperor, and to lead to submission the bishops who still did not recognize the new role of the pontiff as the sole ruler of the Church.

6. As always happened throughout history, the populace was used to destabilize the order. But failing to replace the aristocratic ruling class, the Church incited the third state of the citizens, known from that historical moment on as bourgeoisie, to take power in the city. Composed of traders and artisans, they represented the wealthy layer of the population, with a basic experience in the administration of their goods and earnings. The cities in which this overturning of the order was successfully actualized were called "communes". The exponents of the urban aristocracy had no choice but to abandon the cities for their rural castles and *villæ* or to adapt to live in the “new order” in order to keep their palaces and possessions within the walls. In exchange, however, they were forced to join the guilds or crafts of the bourgeoisie, becoming merchants, doctors and apothecaries, wool producers, weavers and dyers². This communistic social flattening was, however, destined to a rapid failure as the corporations that corresponded to the most profitable professions (Major Arts) immediately took the political upper hand over the weaker fringes of the bourgeoisie (Minor Arts)³. An economic and professional hierarchy soon appeared within the guilds, dividing their members into masters of art, workers and apprentices. City militias made up of merchants and artisans were also formed. However, the nobles who remained in the towns immediately took the leadership. The municipal experiment lasted for two or three centuries, soon reabsorbed in the larger order of the Princedoms. The city returned to be governed by the noble council; however, the subversive experience of the communes had left an indelible imprint in the mentality of the third state, the bourgeoisie.
7. The pauper’ tendencies of the Pataria, fundamentally anti-religious, blended with the dualist Balkan heresy of the Bogomils, known in Northern Italy and in Occitanie with the name of Cathars or Albigensians⁴. As we have already said, the Cistercian current of the Benedictine Order, pursuing the false ideal of a return of the Catholic Church to a presumed evangelical poverty⁵, was instead instrumental to the realization of the subversive plan against the feudal system. Many Cistercians abandoned their hermitages and monasteries to rush to the cities and communes to carry out a “social” action in favour of the poor people, thus completely betraying the rule of Saint Benedict and the ideals of isolation and contemplation. It is following their footsteps that later the orders of the

¹ The city inhabitants were divided in the three states: the first state, namely the ecclesiastics; the second state, the patricians and nobles; the third state, the *bourgeoisie*. The populace had no right to citizenship, as was the case in ancient Greece and Rome.

² The other arts or corporations were those of the cobblers, fishermen, butchers, painters, millers, masons, carpenters, roofers and chimney sweeps, tailors, bakers, saddlers, blacksmiths, furriers and tanners.

³ The merchants and owners, more similar to the social functions of the *vaiśyas*, imposed their authority on the *śūdra* mining corporations.

⁴ Paul Labal, *Los Cátaros. Herejía y crisis social*, Barcelona, Ed. Crítica, 1984.

⁵ In reality, even when Jesus, in the last three years of his life, lived in community with his apostles, he never embraced poverty or mendicancy. He lived of generous donations from his followers. In fact, Judas Iscariot was commissioned to be the treasurer of the group.





Friars Minor, the Franciscans, and of the Friars Preachers, the Dominicans, were founded. Long in suspicion of heresy, these orders marked the end of Latin monasticism¹.

8. The "social" activism of the mendicant orders was not limited to providing food, health and economic assistance to the poor. The friars gave great importance to the education of the populace. The convents first became schools for children in order to help them find employment in the different municipal guilds. However, the Franciscans and, above all, the Dominicans eventually founded the universities, initially in cathedrals and convents, in order to form a predominantly ecclesiastical and bourgeois ruling class inspired by their anti-feudal ideology. In the beginning, only the disciplines of canon law and Roman law (*utrumque jus*) were taught, but soon the faculties multiplied, opening up to the most profane and scientific disciplines. The schism from Byzantine Orthodox Christianity prompted the Catholic theology taught in universities to abandon the Patristics and to create a Scholastic philosophy supported by Aristotelian logic. With the passage of time, Scholasticism became increasingly rationalistic, also with the contribution of the Arab philosophy of Avicenna and Averroes, to the point of exiting its accepted dogmatic limits². With Abelard, Duns Scotus and Occam, scholastic Aristotelianism eventually translated into nominalism or naturalism. In such a grave way have the paupers and mendicant orders contributed to the creation of a secular and, ultimately, anti-religious culture.



5. Saint Dominic and Saint Francis

9. Indeed, the mendicant orders, despite their pauperism, were the expression of the third state, of the bourgeoisie to which both Saint Dominic de Guzman and Saint Francis³ of Assisi belonged. The transformation of the cities into communes led to a complete revolution of the world view in a

¹ Many people confuse the monastic order with paupers' orders. Monasticism, which originated as early as the second Christian generation, pursued the ideal of silence and solitude in order to surrender to the contemplative experience. By rule, the monk lived far from society, in a hermitage or in a coenobium-monastery. This lasted until the year 1000 AD. Monasteries and abbeys were built in inaccessible places far from castles and villages. The friars of the mendicant or paupers' orders, on the other hand, built their convents in the cities in order to actively participate in the building of the municipalities and in favour of the less fortunate strata of society. The degeneration in the social sense of monasticism had in fact sanctioned its annulment, overcome as it was by the activism of the Dominicans and, in particular, by that of the Franciscans.

² Our Indian readers, belonging to a knowledge-based tradition, may find difficult to understand the dogmas of a faith-based religion. The dogma, in fact, is an invisible reality (*adr̥ṣṭi sattā*) difficult to understand for unripe minds, which is therefore imposed as a truth of faith. Every deviation from the dictates of the dogma is therefore a reason for heresy. Even heresy is unknown in the *hindū* context, precisely because of the absence of the concept of dogma; however, "heretic" may partially correspond to the idea of *nāstika*, which designates those who contradict what is declared in the *śāstra*.

³ The nickname Francis, whose real name was in fact John, was given to him by his father who had made his fortune by selling merchandise in Southern France. Thus, the paupers' sympathies of the Bernardone family indeed originated from its business trips made in that Cathar region (Jacques Le Goff, *Saint François d'Assise*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999, pp. 9-17).



mercantile and economic perspective. It continues today and has invaded the entire terraqueous globe like a pestilence. The concept of possession has been replaced with that of property. Possession was the feudal conception, whereby all the goods belonged only to the Divinity. The Divinity temporarily conferred on the Emperor (sskrt. *Samrāt*), his earthly representative, the possession of the universe. Similarly, the Sovereign then temporarily granted, based on merits and needs, large or small parts of his dominion to his subjects, in order to administer them, improve them and grow them to the greater glory of God¹. Property, on the other hand, proclaims the complete belonging of the good to the individual. This last conception was adopted, practiced and spread by the mendicant orders. The theory and the practice of the free market in fact sprouted, well before Adam Smith, in the Catholic world and not in the Protestant one. Scholastic philosophers were attentive to the communal economy, anticipating some fundamental theoretical acquisitions such as the subjective conception of value. The Dominicans Albertus Magnus (1193-1280) and his great pupil Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), as well as the later Scholastics, thought that the right price of a good did not depend on some intrinsic quality, but was that determined by the *communis opinio* or *communis aestimatio*, that is by the market request. Likewise, the Provençal Franciscan Pietro Giovanni Olivi (1248-1298) was the first true proponent of the theory of the subjectivity of the value-based price. On the threshold of the Renaissance, Saint Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444), another Franciscan, in addition to providing a masterful analysis of the virtues and function of the entrepreneur, brought to the fore once again the theory of subjective value developed by Olivi².

10. The religious, political and social upheaval that began in the 11th century, together with the disappearance of initiation in Latin monasticism, could not fail to influence art. In contrast with the Romanesque, which had its roots in the sacred Roman and Byzantine imperial art, a new style was imposed, the Gothic.



1. Romanesque basilica and gothic cathedral

The ideologist of the new style was the Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis. His conception of the sacred building implies that the transcendent God illuminates from the outside the interior part of the church through large windows³. Light, a symbolic representation of divine love, penetrates the interior illuminating the darkness of the human heart. Great opponent of Suger was Saint Bernard, who challenged him with the idea that God is actually already present even inside⁴. Indeed, the tenebrous church represent the heart of man in which God is always there in his real presence in the Eucharistic form. Therefore, according to Saint Bernard, the church is a *hortus conclusus*, a representation of both the entire universe and the body of man, at whose centre is located the all-

¹ Conception that reflects the parable of the talents (*Gospel of Saint Matthew*, XXV.14-30).

² Murray Rothbard, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith*, Auburn-Alabama, Mises Institute, 1995, pp. 47-64. The contemporary detractors of the Templar Order have instead accused the Templars of being the devisers of capitalism based only on the fact that they were first to use the letters of credit!

³ Erwin Panofsky, "Suger abate di Saint-Denis", in *Il significato nelle arti visive*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999, pp. 109-145.

⁴ Lia Pierluigi, *L'estetica teologica di Bernardo di Chiaravalle*, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007.





pervading Divinity¹. The concept that God would only be external to the human individual entails a dualistic idea that is incompatible with the deification (*theosis*). Thus, a western monk who was still practicing the initiatory contemplation, as was Saint Bernard, denounced the loss of a metaphysical point of view. He also lamented the default of the essentiality of the Romanesque forms, suitable for inducing meditation, denouncing the adoption of complex and wonderful shapes and rich ornaments, typical of the Gothic style, as a source of distraction. But things were falling. Despite the opposition of the great abbot of Clairvaux, the Gothic became established in the wave of the embourgeoisement of the Catholic Church. To build Gothic cathedrals within the communal walls, the mason guilds were called. Until then, the masons had been employed only in the construction of castles and palaces, in harmony with their belonging to the *Ars Regia*. Previously, the Romanesque abbeys, monasteries and basilicas had been built by the monks themselves, as the building of places of worship was a prerogative of the *Ars Sacerdotalis*.² Earlier to that, the adoption of a complex hermetic symbolism³ in the construction of new cathedrals was unusual. It was considered belonging to a too naturalistic perspective of the tradition, and therefore was censored by Saint Bernard and his disciples. They concluded that this symbolism came from the domain of intermediary and magical sciences (*goetia*) and not from theology. For this reason, that art was called Gothic⁴.



6. Romanesque basilica and gothic cathedral

11. The schism of the Catholic Church from the Orthodox one provoked a further distancing and a renovated hostility towards the Byzantine Empire. The crusades, with the passage of numerous "Frankish" armies through the domains of the Eastern Empire, impoverished and weakened Byzantium. The fourth crusade was a real stab in the back of Eastern Christianity. The Latin conquest of Constantinople, carried out above all by Venice, constituted a blow from which the Byzantine power could never be restored. After the failure of the various crusades, when the Catholic Europe abandoned the Near East to its fate, the Byzantine Empire was practically offered on a silver platter to the Islamic invasion and conquest. This must be considered as one of the most obscure pages in the history of Christianity. The crusades, however, had a positive aspect, as they represented an incentive for the rebirth of the chivalrous and imperial ideal. We will return to this subject further on.

As one can infer from the last lines, despite the devastation of the Empire produced by the 11th century ecclesial reform, the Imperial and chivalrous ideal still had several cards to play. For three centuries the initiates in the warrior ways of the Latin world were still able to emerge with surprising tenacity, parrying the repeated blows that the Holy See continued to inflict.

Petrus Simonet de Maisonneuve

¹ This coincides greatly with the conception of the Hindū Temple as described in all the *Śilpa Sūtras*.

² The guilds of Roman origin (*collegia fabrorum*) were actually perpetuated during the barbarian invasions in the patrician *villae* and feudal castles. Differently, the sacred craftsmanship that had been preserved in the monasteries was carried out by the same monks who specialized in the different sciences of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* and in their corresponding *Artes sacerdotales*.

³ We will dedicate a chapter to Hermeticism in conclusion of the medieval period.

⁴ As it is well known, this definition has nothing to do with the people of the Goths.