

## What were the papal reformers trying to reform?

The programme of the reformers of the late eleventh century was certainly not a new one. Some might argue that this was its principal strength. Rather, it should possibly be described not really as a movement for *reform*, but rather for *restoration*, since ideas continually harked back to the powers of the early papacy, and to the first pope Peter himself. Hugh of Cluny, for example, considered that Hildebrand was as zealous as he was on his own account, but Hildebrand's reply is perhaps a more significant measure of reforming motives: '*it is a lie! I seek not my own glory, but that of the Holy Apostles.*' This is certainly an appealing reason as to why the popes of the Hildebrandine era chose to name themselves Gregory, Leo, Victor and Damasus for example - all names which broke with the immediate past - John, Benedict etc. - they wished to refer back to the great popes of times past. Yet the problem which this reforming party faced was that others could question their right to supremacy based on the same idea of a true theocracy on the model of the early Christian period. Thus Frankish and Salian kings and emperors sincerely believed that by virtue of their coronation they had been given authority from God to carry out affairs as they saw fit. Later, Frederick Barbarossa could similarly exercise religious authority by claiming to be the successor of Justinian and Constantine. It was this tangled situation with conflicting views of ultimate authority on earth that Hildebrand and his successors were attempting to unravel, to the benefit of the papacy.

What makes the papal reforming movement so difficult gauge is the fact that it was attempting to genuinely change the foundations of the entire social structure of European society. In trying to move a seemingly innocuous beam, it seriously destabilised everything around it. For example, to demand that no priest do be judged in a layman's court called into question the status of the temporalities belonging to the priest's church. This in turn threatened the taxable revenue of the lord. This in turn threatened his ability to gather troops to defend himself and his own possessions. This is at the heart of the dispute between Henry II and Thomas Becket. The fact that Henry III in Germany issued a constitution forbidding monks to swear oaths in law-courts might tend to support this view, that it was the consequences of church reform rather than the ambitions which caused the most resistance - monks by themselves had no property, and thus the dictates of canon law were not threatening to the lay establishment. On the other hand, as we can see from the case involving William of Saint-Calais in 1088, that rulings such on the status of the clergy also enabled churchmen to attempt to avoid retribution for their temporal mistakes - by declaring his non-recognition of William Rufus's court, the Bishop of Durham clearly hoped to avoid the consequences of his support for Robert Curthose in the latter's rebellion shortly beforehand. What both of these examples shows is that what might originally have appeared to be a matter for the church only - since instead of lay courts, ecclesiastical courts and the fuller canon law could be used - in fact could have profound effects on the wider governance of countries. The enormous temporal wealth of church institutions, combined with its pivotal role in the daily life of the whole of Europe ensured that any changes to the church were matters of huge concern to all with any sort of power.

There were two main aims of the reform movement which I intend to elaborate, both descended from the search to restore the dignity the Church had enjoyed at the time of the apostles. The first was to increase the piety of clergy at large by removing the temporal influences on clergy at all levels. The second was to re-establish the primacy of the papacy at the head of a functional church hierarchy.

The standard of piety exhibited by the clergy at large was of just as much interest to most monarchs as it was to the papacy. The absolute prohibition of simony was one example of a concept which was firmly supported by monarchs across the continent. Since it was mentioned

in the Acts of Apostles it was not doubted that simony was a heresy, and this is the language that was always used in describing it. Since Gregory VII in a letter to a French bishop feels it necessary to say of Philip I of France *'For either the king himself, abandoning the evil merchandise of simoniacal heresy, shall allow suitable persons to be promoted to the government of the church, or the French people shall be smitten by the sword of a general anathema and will refuse to obey him in future'*, the depth of feeling which this particular sin elicited can easily be seen. Indeed, since Gregory's predecessor Alexander could also say to William of Normandy and England that *'we learn from no dubious report how much glory Your Virtue bestows upon the holy church, at one time by crushing the force of the heresy of simony'* we can see how a temporal ruler could easily earn the goodwill of the papacy. The very fact that Gregory could later say to the legate to England that *'It is true that there are many grounds for the Holy Roman Church being able to make complaints against him [William]. For there is none among the kings of such an irreverent and shameless spirit as to keep bishops and archbishops away from the confines of the apostles'* yet nevertheless retain his affection for him, shows how much William could get away with because of his compliance with the primary goal of papal policy as regards the English clergy. We must not on the other hand assume that lay rulers in themselves agreed with simony - Henry III in Germany for example, treated it as a threat to his soul, since both the purchaser and donor were held equally guilty of the sin. Ralf Glaber as an example of this reports him saying *'For as God freely gave me the crown out of the fullness of His mercy, so will I freely give what belongs to His religion.'*

Yet why exactly was the elimination of simony more urgent now, since clearly it was not a new idea? The reason was that church office was increasingly being seen as an extremely good investment, since bishoprics for example came with a large amount of land, and influence over both local and national life. As the fate of the bishop of Nevers at the Council of Rheims showed, rich fathers often considered purchasing them for younger sons who would not inherit significant lands as of right. It was only his ignorance of the monetary transaction which spared him the excommunication which befell the bishop of Langres. Heresy was the strongest crime the church could pronounce, and it is probable that it was the use of this appellation which was the real reason for the decline of simony.

Although not classed as a heresy, the drive for clerical chastity also was a main thrust of reforming policy, which, Gregory described as *'an inveterate disease'*. In this he was continuing the policy of Nicholas II, who in his decrees of 1059 had stated that *'If any priest, deacon or subdeacon publicly takes a mistress or refuses to leave one he has already taken, we forbid him to sing Mass or to read the Gospel, Epistle or Mass or to remain in the presbytery with those who obey this decree.'* The eastern church continued to allow their priests to marry and propagate in the same way as lay people did. The western church, by contrast, was perhaps paradoxically influenced by the heretical Manichaeans as well as by the monastic orders which dwelt among them, and had long considered celibacy a vital part of the separation of the spiritual and physical sides of Man. In pursuing the celibacy of the clergy, it is also noticeable that Gregory uses phrase, of *'those that are guilty of fornication'*, clearly implying yet further the sinfulness of the deed, since priests were of course forbidden to marry, although in practice they often did. Lay rulers as well appeared to be co-operative as regards this measure, such as William I of England who *'bound priests by oath to dismiss their wives'*, possibly since it was also not in their interests to see the lands of the church alienated by the same inheritance-customs which were adopted by their lay tenants. Indeed, and this was strictly uncanonical, vacant bishoprics proved extremely profitable, and this source of revenue could be threatened by hereditary clergy.

Yet another reason why simony and concubinage were attacked so viciously in the second half of the eleventh century was because it had already brought the church into disrepute. The morally degenerate popes of the middle of the century had marked a low-point in the fortunes of the

papacy, with Benedict IX as a supreme example: he who even renounced his papacy for a consideration of 1000 pounds of silver in favour of his god-child. The spectacle in 1044 of there being three living popes in Rome was a major reason for the second main aim of the reforming movement: the establishment of a clear clerical hierarchy superior to the laity and presided over by the pope himself. Henceforth, the reformers planned to make the papacy into not only an institution deserving respect due to its function of creating emperors: it was to lead the whole of Christendom in the ways that the early popes had done.

The period between 955 and 1057 had seen 25 popes of which 12 imperial appointments and the others creatures of the Roman nobility, so for those stressing the primacy of the Lateran, creating an independent basis for papal elections was a priority, and the major obstacle the routine intervention of the laity in church affairs. Yet this was not only shown in Rome itself, but all over the continent, and *eigenkirchen* provided a standing problem to overcome. The great majority of new monastic foundations, such as Bec and Jumièges in Normandy, were at least indebted to and at most practically controlled by their benefactors, such that a capitulary dating back as far as the Carolingian period has to stipulate that no layman is to install a priest in his church without the permission of the bishop. In Germany, the monastery of Saint-Trond even sought royal investiture when its bishop, Hermann of Metz, was declared schismatic.

The key to resolving lay intervention, as to so many of the issues which came out of this period, lay in the new concentration on canon law. Although it was impossible for contemporaries to know that the two greatest texts from which the church drew its regulations - the Donation of Constantine and the Pseudo-Isidore - were largely false, the literate workings of the papal court proved itself to be more than a match for the unwritten customs of Germanic law-making, at least until the time of Frederick Barbarossa. It also did not prevent subtle changes being placed in them. Where for instance the *Pseudo-Isidore* had granted bishops protection from laymen by appealing to the pope, its reissue in the *Collection of 74 titles* omitted the word 'bishops', and thereby secured protection for the whole of the clergy. When Humbert was able to say of lay investiture in 1058 that *'Everything is done in a perverted manner in rejection of the holy canons, and the first things come last and the last first. For the lay authority comes first in electing and confirming and then, willy-nilly, the consent of laity, people and clergy follows.'* - the key words here must be *in rejection of the holy canons*, which imply a scholarship of law already by that point which no secular authority could match.

However, since on this issue there was a very great clash between the canon law and the traditional rights of secular rulers, it was on this issue more than any other that struggle between *regnum* and *sacerdotum* took place. While lay rulers demanded the right to decide who would occupy the positions of power in their own domains, canon law demanded that clergy had the right to elect themselves. If a deep distrust then developed between lay rulers and the papacy on this issue, is it surprising? Is it surprising that William the Conqueror for example, was *'of such an irreverent and shameless spirit as to keep bishops and archbishops away from the confines of the apostles'*, since when under William's son the archbishop of Canterbury visited the papal council at Clermont, Eadmer records Urban II as *'having excommunicated all laymen who gave investiture of churches, also bound by that same sentence of excommunication all who became the vassals of laymen for ecclesiastical estates.'* The papal commands were becoming more dangerous to the temporal power of rulers. However, as regards the rulers, it was only the German kings and emperors who directly went against the power of the pope, while other rulers resorted to more devious tactics, such as holding a canonical election with only one candidate, as was the case with Henry I of England. Though the Concordat of Worms may have seemed a victory for the papal party, in that canonical elections were recognised over direct investiture, the rights of the ruler were also recognised and a casting vote granted.

What cannot be doubted is that this reforming movement greatly increased the status of the papacy relative to the laity, but this was achieved only in the spiritual sphere. Gregory VII said to the bishop of Metz that *'everybody knows the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who says in the Gospel "You are Peter, and upon this rock I build my church; and whatsoever you bind in earth shall be bound in heaven also; and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* *Are kings excepted here, and are they not among the sheep which the son of God entrusted to St Peter?'* In other words, the pope claimed that by virtue of his office that he was responsible for the soul of the emperor, and that therefore he deserved authority on earth over the latter, and not vice versa. However the root of papal power of course was spiritual and not actual. When Henry V invaded Italy in 1111, he was quite capable of imprisoning Pope Paschal II until the latter offered concessions, and it was only the physical force of the Lombards and the lure of Crusade which prevented Frederick Barbarossa from humiliating the papacy late in the twelfth century. Gregorian reforms might have made the pope the chief spiritual figure of Christendom, but it did not bring a true papal monarchy.