

PREPARATIVE FACTORS TO THE DECLINE OF PAPAL INFLUENCE IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

St. Peter Known as the first pope was given the unique privilege, after Christ Himself, of being the principal foundation stone of the Church, and of possessing the keys symbolizing supreme authority in the Church. The other Apostles were to share as a group in the authority to teach and rule in the Church. Slowly the Church (Catholic) had universal authority in the Church, and the states where they have influence. Soon, the Vatican City began as a marginal player in the reshaping of the European international order after the First World War. The Vatican's interwar activism sought to disseminate a new Catholic vision of international affairs, which militated against the separation of church and state, and in many contexts helped undermine the principles of the League of Nations' minority rights regime. Thanks in no small part to the assiduity of individual papal diplomats – who disseminated the new Catholic vision of international affairs by supporting anti-communist political factions – the Vatican was able to claim a more prominent role in European political affairs and lay the legal and discursive foundations for an alternate conception of the European international order, conceived in starkly anti-secular terms. This paper studies the decline of the decline of papal influence on Europe.

Keywords: Papal; Papal Influence; Pope; Europe.

INTRODUCTION

The inglorious historical decline or end of the papal influence in Europe was neither brought by special individuals nor a group of persons. It was rather a time and the changes-in-the-times. The promising beginning or rising of the papacy and the splendour of its peak of political power is metaphorically compared to nothing else but the rising of the sun at its zenith and the

setting of the same. That the day had advanced, the shadows lengthened, the heat of the sun had begun to be less impressive with its light ceased to be helpful.

Corroborating this, Latourette, Kenneth Scott, and Ralph Winter (1975) observed that, “between the last half of the twelfth and the forepart of the thirteenth century the papacy had reached the height of its power in Western Europe”. That never had the papal influence been so strongly felt in all aspects of their social life. “That never again did it make its weight felt so potently in the cultures of the area” (p. 478). He also adds this: Increasingly after 1350 Western Europe became the main centre of Christianity. Here was the chief hope of that faith. Due to several factors, the Eastern churches were warring in numbers and vigor. Despite the mounting vitality shown by the Orthodox Church in Russia, the gains registered in that land, and claim that Moscow had become the Third Rome, the citadel and guardian of the true faith, Eastern Europe was still on the periphery of Christendom. Moreover, in Western Europe, Christianity had ploughed more deeply into the entire life of the population than it had elsewhere” (p. 624).

The world by the final part of the thirteenth century had begun to change in many ways and it was these changes that worked together against the pope's exercise of absolute power. Developing among the different segments of the European community was the spirit of nationalism. People now were ready to back their kings for the reason of their national prejudice and pride. Powerful kings were coming up or arising to supplant the emperor as the Holy Roman Empire at this time at the verge of disintegration. This dissolved the feudal structure of Medieval Europe. Moreover, the clergy were losing their monopoly as the common people were now admitted into the secrete of learning universities development and the study of philosophy had begun also to develop the inquiring minds of the individuals, as well as scientific inventions with many discoveries, were being made (Weinreich 2016). All these and more others join together to affect the papacy as to work it down and thereby created an atmosphere in which oppositions to the pope could be sustained. The papacy was almost in a state of spiritual and hopeless moral degradation. It had become now in the hand of the Roman aristocracy a political pawn, who fought over who should own the papacy. This meant that the papacy itself was corrupt and powerless.

THEORIES HELD ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE POPE AND THE EMPEROR.

Different theories were held concerning the relationship that exists between the spiritual power here represented by the pope as the head of the church and the temporal power represented by the emperor as head of the Empire. According to Houghton (1980) “one was that each was independently commissioned by God, the pope to ruler the souls of men, the Emperor to rule their bodies. Neither was set above the other, but the two were to cooperate and help each other. Another theory was that the emperor was superior to the pope in secular affairs; and a third, the one held by the papal party, maintained that the relation of the two powers ordained by God included the subordination of temporal to spiritual authority, even in civil affairs” (p. 51).

As God Almighty in His wisdom has set two lights, the sun and the moon in the heavens, in the same vein, he had made official or put on earth two powers, the spiritual and the temporal. Besides, as the moon is inferior to and receives its light from the sun, without any doubt, therefore, the emperor is inferior to the pope and receives all power from him, the pope and his supporters argued. The basis of this argument could be traced to the year 800AD. When emperor Charlemagne was crown by a pope.

STRIFE BETWEEN THE POPE AND THE EMPEROR

There is two illimitable ambition of the strife that existed between the two powers. This nefarious conflict launched Europe for centuries into political disorder and pulled the church through the mire of darkest crimes. In rapid succession, one pope followed another either by being deposed, or some others being cast into prison and some others were murdered. In 963, Otto made the Romans promise on his return to Rome that they will never elect a pope thereafter without his or his agreement. He then convened a synod where Pope John XII (955-963) was charged and found guilty of a list of very dirty crimes, and in the end deposed him. It was during the reign of Pope John XII that the papacy started experiencing the lowest decline in the tenth century with a major change in Helian politics which directly affected the position of the popes (Rosemberg 235). In the synod, all agreed that John XII was a monster of iniquity and was charged with every crime that depraved human nature. He was even accused to have drunk to the devil's health and of have involved the heathen god's and various demons help as he threw dice (Houghton 1980).

Investiture as another area was concerned with the claim of kings and rulers to appoint bishops and boots. Hildebrand (Gregory VII) declared forcefully that “any person holding office in the church committed sin if he received that office from the hands of a layman, that is, a man not ordained to the church office. On the other hand kings and rulers could not overlook the fact that very extensive estates belonged to the church in France and Germany half of the land and wealth was in the hands of bishops and abbots – and the right to tax and to require military aid would pass from the state if temporal princes failed to assert their rights over land by means of investiture” (Houghton 1980, p. 51-52). Whether bishops and abbots were servants of the king or of the church is the question to resolve. When Henry disregarded the papal decrees, he was summoned to Rome by Pope Gregory, but Henry pronounced, in turn, the deposition of the Pope instead of waiting on the Pope. It was because of this that Gregory excommunicated Henry and declares him deposed. Though there was reconciliation the Emperor continues to cherish in his heart and revenge. Seven years later, Henry descended finally upon Rome with an army and succeeded in casting Gregory VII into exile at Salerno, where he died in 1085. The death of Gregory didn't end the strife between the church-spiritual power and the state – the temporal power, it continued indeed for centuries.

WHY THE DECLINE OF THE PAPACY?

The reasons for the decline of the papacy were immense and complex.

Worldly popes (failure of the clergy)

The papacy came or went into a period of decline as the Middle Ages waned. Cairns (1981) affirm that “between 1309 and 1439 the Roman church sank to a new low in the estimation of the laity. The hierarchical organization, with its demand for celibacy and absolute obedience to the pope, and the feudalization of the Roman church led to a decline in clerical morals’ (p. 245). The picture is also painted by Thompson and Combee (2009) thus: “The popes had always distorted Christianity, but now they became corrupt in a way that was obvious to all. In pursuit of money and power, popes became increasingly involved in politics. Some even practiced an immoral lifestyle. They became so worldly to the point; they seemed like ordinary governments figures than church officials” (p. 181).

A large number of priests took combines or took part in illegal or unapproved love affairs with the women in their congregations. They even stood against celibacy as the instincts of man

as well as to the biblical statements in favour of the married state. Pope was looked up to by the people because they believed him to be the representative of Christ on earth as the successor of Peter as he claimed. However, the people were forced to lose respect for the popes when they seemed to be more in politics than the church. The popes gave attention more often to their secular duties than they did to their spiritual duties. Again, some because of the problem of caring for children that were born to them through these unions of illicit love affairs gave less attention to their clerical duties and paid more attention to that problem. This was a gulf that led to the decline of the papacy.

The Rise of Nationalism

The thirteen century at first sight saw the papacy great victory over the empire. "The Hohenstaufen family has destroyed the union of Sicily with the empire cancelled, and imperial authority virtually restricted to Germany, which, itself had fragmented into several great Lordships. The triumph was only apparent and was undone by the rise of the nation-state" (Morris 1993). Nationality as one of the forces that help in declining the papacy caused men to feel that, "as Frenchmen or Englishmen, they had common interest against all foreigners, even the pope himself. Such a sense of unity had not existed in the earlier Middle Ages. It was rapidly developing, especially in France and England in the latter half of the thirteenth century (Walker 2014). Among the different segments of the European community, nationalism was developing. People were now because of their national pride and prejudice ready to support their kings. New and powerful kings were now coming up as a result of the Holy Roman Empire that was at the point of disintegration to replace the emperor.

The Rise of the Nation-States

The rise of the nation-states was the political factor that played a significant role in the decline of papal influence in Europe. It was contrary to the universal sovereignty idea inherent in the concepts of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church. The Nations of 1300 were howbeit to a great extent very power check on the church's right than those of 1150. "There had been an immense improvement in the machinery of law and administration. More important still, the king was coming to be seen as in some sense the embodiment of the whole community. Nobles, Knights, townsmen, and clergy form part of representative assemblies, parliaments or estates, which were perceived as speaking for the 'Community of the realm' (McManners 2001,

p. 54). Adding his voice to this, Cairns (1981) affirm thus; "King and middle class could carry on business safely, and the middle class in return gave money so that the king could run the state. The result of that was strong enough to defy the pope's dicta and secondly, to make the church a subject of national interest in Bohemia, France, and England" (p. 248).

In Western Europe, groups of people who have or possess a common tradition, culture, and language standard conceive of themselves as different nations, especially in Spain, France and England National monarchs under the motto "The king is emperor in his domain", designed or modelled their system of government to resemble or to be in accordance with that of the Byzantine and Holy Roman empires, this brought them into strife with blatantly and disdainfully proud popes. King John of England for instance, had made his territories a continuing forever possession of the papacy in 1213, however, monarchs like Edward III that follows declined and rejected to pay the papal tribute (Thompson and Combee 2009).

The church claims now were subject to the regulation by statutes that the whole community had to have considered. Catching the attention is the number of statutes of provisos' and premiere legislated and passed from 1351 onwards in England to stop and avert the papacy from neither making nay appointment to England ecclesiastical office nor discharging any form of judicial authority. English parliament in 1366 declined and rejected to acknowledge the validity of king John's to hand over his kingdom to the pope. This was how the rise of great nation-states in Europe threatened papal supremacy and thereafter led to the decline of the papacy.

Papal Taxation

Pope John XXII to finance the two papal courts developed an elaborate system of ecclesiastical taxes that bred wide-ranging indignity displeasure or grievance, especially amid those who stood against his pro-French policies (Brunner 2010).

In this vein Frankforter III (1971) explains thus:

Papal taxation to support two papal courts became an onerous burden to the people of Europe. Papal income was made up of income from the papal estates; tithes, which the faithful paid; annotates, which was the payment of the first year's salary by a church official to the pope; the right of purveyance, by which Churchmen and their constituents had to pay the pope's traveling expenses while he was in their area; the right of spoil, by which the personal property of the upper clergy went to the pope upon their death; Peter's Pence, which was paid annually by the laity in many lands; and the income from vacant offices as well as numerous fees (p. 76-77).

It was the pope in the real sense that took the step that led to strife between the two powers. A bull known as *clericus Laicos* was issued by him in 1296 in which Europe's Kings were forbidden from getting revenue from the clergy and the church to meet financial obligations of the government except by his (pope's) permission. This would have stood as a new victory won by the popes over the temporal powers because the king had been taxing the church and the clergy in their lands without the knowledge and permission (Tierney 1988). The king of England (Edward 1) and his counterpart in France, King Philip IV both reacted quickly against this measure by the pope. But King Philip seemed more determined to test the power of the pope at all cost and succeeded at last in forcing the pope to resume his own claims by issuing a counter bull, *Esti de statu* (Tierney 1988). Hence, the king of France won the first round of the great contest over the pope. The national states who are now powerful rulers and the strong middle class that assists to and back them expressed annoyance and begrudge the siphon off wealth from the national treasury to the papacy treasury. This was particularly true of England and France's rulers. The English in the fourteenth century hated to pay any money they thought would go only to England's enemy France since the residence of the pope was in French king territory.

Lay lawyers and the study of Roman Law

The Growth of a body of lay lawyers and the renewed study of the Roman law is an essential development that contributed immensely to the decline of the papacy. These men were step-by-step supplanting ecclesiastics as kingly counsellors, and advancing the effectual or producing the desired effect of the royal power through the Roman foregoing from a body of law which did not know medieval ecclesiastical conditions (Walker 2014).

Growing conviction among thoughtful and religious Men

Thoughtful and religious men were convinced that such recent world aims that the papacy had pursued were clashing and conflicting with the church's true interests. These growing forces were what the papacy much figures out with. From the worldly standpoint or perspective, the papacy's weakness was that they lack enough or good physical forces at their jettison. The papacy must balance off one contender against another, and the ruined deeply stirred in Germany turned the door open to France with not having forces that could be caused to corresponded or suited against her (Walker 2014).

Lay Investiture

The first great demonstration of power in which the papacy engaged after it had attained its height was over the question of Lay Investiture. This was to be a contest between the pope and the emperor himself. It was a real tussle for supreme power, meant to decide who was really under whom or who was subject in whose kingdom (Ajah 1989).

Schaff testifies that "Lay Investiture was a practice by which the kings and nobles, although laymen, appointed bishops and abbots and bestowed them with the authority they needed for the exercise of their ecclesiastical duties. Thus, it was the king or noble who would hand a staff and a ring to those clergies as a sign of their appointment (p. 25). A possible future effect or a possible significant was that the clergy so-appointed owed the noble all allegiance to the like every other vassal owed to who appointed him vassal, even to point of going to defence his lord in the ward.

This practice of appointing bishop by the thing was corrupted as Durant attests thus: was influenced by political, social, or pecuniary considerations and often sold the dignity to the highest bidder, without any regard to intellectual or moral qualifications. In 1075, Gregory determined that the time had come to and the lay investiture of bishops and decreed the penalty of excommunication for the offense. The first great papal-imperial crisis occurred during the pontificate of the fiery reformed Gregory vii (1056-1106). The crisis depended as Gregory excommunicated Henry IV's advisers (O'Brien 2018). To increase the papal power, Gregory vii brought himself a serious conflict with Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. Pope Gregory vii for forbidden and barred the lay investitures custom. Laymen such as emperors and kings power to choose bishops and other church officials, and called for the exclusive right of investiture for the church (Thompson and Combee 2009). Not wanting to trade the potential source of his power, Henry IV who just defeated decisively or disastrously the rebellious Saxons at the battle of Langensalza and felt he be in firm control of his German territories. He too felt that the moment was propitious for the final assertion of his authority over the German bishops at worms, and compelled them to renounce Pope Gregory for moral corruption as well as for having been elected irregular (Hall 204). The accusation of Pope Gregory being elected irregularly was true technically, even though the right or suited procedure was later used and followed briefly after Gregory became pope.

Henry's move was quickly counter by Pope Gregory vii excommunicating him. The German nobles (German magnates) seized this chance for general revolt Henry with Pope's blessing. In October they met and agreed to depose the emperor unless he was pardoned by the

pope within 12 months. Henry escaped and fled Germany making his way with incredible difficulty to the castle of Canossa, where the pope was in residence. There Henry presented himself as a penitent, barefoot, and in wretched clothing, and forces the pope to grant him the absolution that had been declared open to all no matter what the crime, by the church fathers of the third and fourth centuries (Pegg 2008).

By this exercise, the emperor had been brought literally to his knees by the pope, but the emperor had won back his kingdom and gained diplomatic victory. The struggle was not yet over. The German nobles elected one of their numbers, Rudolf, king and sought papal support, which the pope gave by again by ex-communication Henry. However, this time, the weight of moral, authority was no longer so clearly with Gregory whose concerns now appeared political rather than spiritual and his allies faded away. Henry was able to defeat the anti-king in battle, and in turn through the agency of the German bishops to install Clement III as an anti-pope. Gregory VII died in an exile (Yawn 2014).

CONCLUSION

These events or factors were a staggering blow to the papacy that led to the decline of its influence in Europe. The papacy of the Roman Catholic Church in the thirteenth century reached the peak of its power. However, problems in the fourteenth century led the papacy to a serious decline. The monarchies of Europe were at this time, no longer ready to agree to papal claims of temporal supremacy. Some instances are obvious in the fight between, Pope Boniface VIII and Philip IV of France in his desire to acquire new revenues and that between Pope Gregory VIII and King Henry of Germany over lay investiture to mention but a few. It should be noted that the decline of the papacy was a gradual process and not as rapid as that of the Carolingians.

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