CHAPTER ONE

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE DURING THE INVESTITURE CONTEST

Introduction

The ‘first European revolution’ had many facets, one of which was the growth of a new public culture in the first half of the eleventh century.\(^1\) One keyword in this new culture was dissent, manifested first and foremost in the new heretical communities, in the peace of God movement and in the Pataria. These movements, although partly indebted to a tiny group of intellectual leaders, had a clear popular element, resulting in what some have called the first religious mass movement of the Middle Ages.\(^2\) However, the new public culture also had repercussions for the learned discourse. Surfacing in the middle of the eleventh century, four discussions of public nature, all of which were imperative for the

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\(^1\) See above, Introduction. The term is from Moore 2000: 15: ‘Nothing more clearly expresses the revolutionary character of the pontificate of Gregory VII than his willingness to invoke popular opinion…’

\(^2\) Until recently, research on the popular element to medieval culture focused almost exclusively on the later Middle Ages. For recent contributions that address the theme of popular and lay religiosity in particular, see Rubin 1991; Swanson 1995. Mackinney 1930: 189 first noted that the popular movements were of great importance in stimulating social consciousness, in encouraging popular activity in public affairs, and in strengthening public morale in support of a regime of law and order. Later these insights have been confirmed, for instance in relation to the Crusades. Erdmann 1977 recognised early on the popular side to the Crusades and concluded that neither the peace movement nor the Crusades would have existed without popular support. This view has received support from Runciman 1965; Riley-Smith 1987; Bull 1993; Morris 1998; Richard 1999: 27. With regard to the peace movement, while Hoffmann 1964b is an exception—rejecting that popular activity had given rise to the peace—a host of investigations have drawn the opposite conclusion. Töpfer 1992: 57, for instance, observes that social conditions had to be ripe for an increased participation of the lower classes in public life. According to Lauranson-Rosaz 1992: 134, the peace assemblies reflect the emergence of an enormous movement of resistance by the free peasants. Landes 1992: 194 claims that the large crowds at peace councils created a powerful public arena of approval for cooperative lords and warriors and of disapproval for disturbers of the peace. The new communal element is stressed by Head 1992: 221. For an overview of recent research, see Paxton 1992. See also Renna 1980; Goetz 1983; Moore 2000.
remoulding of the European societal fabric in the period, dominated the following five decades. The first issue was the critique of simony and the discussion of the validity of the sacraments of simoniacal priests; this debate began in the 1030s, but reached a preliminary climax in the 1050s in the writings of Peter Damian and Humbert of Silva-Candida. While this first discussion was part of the new reform initiatives of Pope Leo IX (1049–1054), the second discussion, which concerned the Eucharist, is perhaps the first clear expression of dissent on the part of a member of the intellectual community. Berengar of Tours’ deviant notion of the Eucharist and the papacy’s struggle to curtail this heresy lasted for close to four decades, ending in the condemnation of Berengar at the Roman synod of 1079. The third discussion centred on anti-pope Cadalus and his claim to the papacy in the first half of the 1060s. Whereas the first two discussions remained on an intellectual level, this struggle brought up the question of the relationship to the secular power and thereby foreshadowed what was to come in the fourth and perhaps most important discussion of the period: the polemical public debate during the Investiture Contest.

This neat division into popular and intellectual movements and discussions is probably not tenable. On one level it replicates the dichotomous relationship between high and low culture, and is therefore open to criticism for its failure to take into consideration recent research which points out the vast overlap between these ‘cultures’. On

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3 Moore 2000: 122 observes quite correctly that attempts to weight the elements of novelty in the intellectual movements of the 11th and 12th centuries with the 9th and 10th decline all too rapidly into semantics. Though few of the individual elements were new, the enormous growth of the common stock of knowledge and the capacity to use it transformed the sophistication of European thought and learning. See also Gibson 1975.


5 Ladner 1968 noted the relationship between church reform, the Eucharist, the Pataria, and the peace initiatives of King Henry III on the one hand, and the ecclesiastical peace movement on the other. To Tellenbach 1993: 91–2, it is wrong to separate the popular religion from a more theoretical religion. See also Remensyder 1992.

6 While older research sustained a dichotomous notion of the relationship between high Latin culture and low vernacular culture, recent research has revised this view. First, from a philological perspective it has been argued that the medieval form of Latin was an invention of the Carolingian period (Richter 1982; Wright 1982; Banniard 1995). Second, spoken Latin was closer to the vernacular, so representatives of the so-called low culture probably knew more Latin than has hitherto been assumed. This knowledge of Latin was geographically conditioned, of course, with Italy attesting to the closest interaction between the vernacular and the Latin language (Dronke 1970;