CHAPTER SIX

THE ‘RIGHT ORDER OF THE WORLD’ ACCORDING TO THE LIBER DE UNITATE ECCLESIAE CONSERVANDA

Introduction

“No one ascends to heaven except for those who come from heaven, the son of man who is in heaven.” With these words, found in the holy gospel, the Lord commanded the unity of the church; united through love and through the unity of its savior, the head of the church, who leads it to heaven.¹

This passage, stressing the theme of unity, opens one of the most famous and important tracts in the polemical literature,² the Liber de unitate ecclesiae conservanda (Ldu) from the early 1090s. By this time, the pontificate of Urban II (1088–1099) had experienced some rough times.³ The royal side had emerged victorious from the fierce struggles of the closing years of Pope Gregory VII’s reign, manifested in the enthronisation of anti-pope Guibert of Ravenna, the sacking of Rome,⁴ and the crowning of King Henry IV as emperor in 1084.⁵ Moreover, the death

¹ Nemo ascendit in caelum, nisi qui descendit de caelo, filius hominis, qui est in caelo. Per haec sancti evangeli verba commendat Dominus unitatem ecclesiae, quae per caritatem concordans membrorum unitate colligit se in caelum in ipso redemptore, qui est caput ecclesiae (Ldu, 273).
³ The papacy of Urban II has been seen as a continuation of the Gregorian reform project; see Schmale 1961a: 275. See also Becker 1964, 1973, 1988; Sproemberg 1965; Erdmann 1977: 306–55; Morris 1989: 121–6. More recently, however, mainly on account of investigations of the legal activity of Urban, Somerville 1989: 182 has observed that Urban did not slavishly recite Gregorian precedents. See also Somerville 1983. Laudage 1992 has pointed to the reform of the canons, whereas Robinson 1999a notes that Urban was more successful in spreading the ‘Gregorian law’ than Gregory himself. According to Norr 1991, it is only under Urban and Paschal II that the papal curia developed a structure suitable for effectuating reforming aims. Kuttner 1980a claims that Urban was pivotal for instigating the doctrine of harmonising interpretation into the canon-law science.
⁴ Recently, Hamilton 2003 has argued convincingly for the symbolic importance of the sack of Rome.
⁵ Althoff 2006: 192 is probably correct when characterising this moment as the high point of Henry’s rule.
of Gregory in 1085 sparked a polemical outburst of royal writings, which strengthened the royalist hold on the intellectual community as the 1080s drew to a close. In general, the 1090s is very clearly a transition period between the heated debate of the 1080s and the change of discourse evident in the polemics of the late period (1099–1122). One indicator of this development is the lack of polemical letters from the royal chancery. Its counterpart, the papal chancery, never reached the same propagandistic heights as under the Gregorian papacy and only three letters have been regarded as polemical: the correspondence to King Ladislaus from 1096, the letter to Bishop Gebhard of Constance, and that to Lucius, provost of St Juventius of Pavia, on simony. Another indicator of the transitional nature of this period is the vast variety of polemics, including the first polemical poem (\textit{Altercatio inter Urbanum et Clementem}), correspondence steeped in animosity (between Walram of Naumburg and Herrand of Halberstadt), canon-law investigation (Deusdedit), and the writings of the schismatic cardinals. The \textit{Ldu} has also particular discursive traits. Compared to the mid-period writers who had to address the excommunication, the release of the oath, the creation of anti-kings and the anti-pope literally as they were happening, the decade or so lapse between these incidents and the composition of the \textit{Ldu} enables the author to approach the issues with detachment. Consequently, the issues considered in the first book are not related to a contemporary public encounter, but rather take the papal letter of 1081 to Hermann of Metz as the textual point of departure. Close scrutiny of its contents reveals a treatise unsurpassed in terms of abstract reasoning and historical reflection. In contrast, the second book, a polemical attack on a letter written by a certain monk of Hirshau criticising the encyclical of anti-pope Guibert of Ravenna, displays quite a different discourse, supplementing the preceding theoretical elaboration with a practical dimension.

Apparently unrecognised in the Middle Ages, the quality of the \textit{Ldu} was acknowledged by Ulric of Hutton, a reformation propagandist who discovered the manuscript in the library of Fulda in 1519.

\begin{itemize}
  \item The polemics from the later part of the 1080s have been considered superior to those of the 1070s and first part of the 1080s in terms of argumentative sophistication; see above, Introduction.
  \item Robinson 1978a: 40; Ziese 1982: 215.
  \item Schütte 1937: 35 underlines the practical aim of the entire \textit{Ldu}.
  \item The full title is: \textit{De unitate ecclesiae conservanda et schismate, quod fuit inter Henrichum III. imp. et Gregorium VII. pont. max. causam eius temporis liber, in vetustiss. Fuldensi bibliotheca ab Hjutteno inventus nuper}.
\end{itemize}