5.1 Introduction

Hierocratic ideas – that the papacy held supreme authority in both spiritual and temporal matters – flourished during the High Middle Ages (1050–1300), and continued to evolve until the early 14th century during which time the scope and authority of papal government increased significantly. At the beginning of the period, during the pontificate of Gregory VII (1073–1085), claims of the primacy of the Roman See were introduced through papal bulls, pronouncements, decrees, and ultimately in the two excommunications of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. The result was a spirited conflict between pope and emperor that has become known as the Investiture Contest. This contest provoked a pamphlet war in which theorists debated the proper relation between the spiritual and temporal powers that would last for the next three centuries.

This debate culminated in the spirited Franco-papal conflict of the late-13th and early-14th centuries between Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303), and the king of France, Philip IV, also known as Philip the Fair. Throughout this struggle theologians and philosophers produced numerous treatises in defense of both sides. The result of this conflict was a decline of the medieval papacy in both

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1 In March 1075 a loose sheet known as Dictatus papae was inserted into Gregory’s official papal register. In the document Gregory presents, in unambiguous language, a list of matters that are subject to papal jurisdiction and authority. While Dictatus papae is primarily concerned with the primacy of the apostolic see within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it is also perhaps the most overt attempt to translate abstract principles of papal jurisdiction and authority into concrete governmental policy until the promulgation of Unam sanctam in 1302 by Boniface VIII. For more on the Investiture Contest, see chapter by Malegam above.

2 Historians also use the words “ecclesiastical” and “secular,” and “church” and “state” when referring to the “spiritual” and “temporal” powers although some historians view the use of the word “state” in this context as anachronistic. For more on this point, see Kenneth Pennington, “Pope Innocent III’s Views on Church and State: A Gloss to Per venerabilem,” in Law, Church, and Society: Essays in Honor of Stephan Kuttner, (eds.) Kenneth Pennington and Robert Somerville (Philadelphia: 1977), 62, n. 5.

prestige and power, especially with the translocation of the papal government to Avignon.4

In perhaps the most elaborate medieval treatise on papal governance, De ecclesiastica potestate (On Ecclesiastical Power), Giles of Rome presents his defense of universal papal monarchy.5 Completed in 1301 and composed as a direct result of the Franco-papal conflict, Giles argues that since the pope is at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, his authority is subject to no one, although he points out that this power resides not in the man himself but, rather, in the papal office which he occupies. He does not mention any special relationship with the empire, which had existed ever since the pope granted Charlemagne the imperial title at his coronation in Rome in 800; rather, he asserts a strictly hierocratic doctrine: the pope is the de iure ruler of the entire world.

Other contemporary works on the hierocratic theory of government were composed in response to the Franco-papal conflict. On the papal side, two works in particular support the hierocratic theory. James of Viterbo’s De regimine Christiano (On Christian Government) composed most likely during the spring and summer of 1302, differs in approach from Giles’ On Ecclesiastical Power, but shares an objective in demonstrating that the pope is the supreme judge of the world in spiritual and temporal matters, thus in all respects secular princes are subject to his judgment.6 James argues that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and because it is the “most perfect of all communities” it must be ruled in the “most perfect way” by the “most perfect form of government,” which, he argues, is monarchy. The church (and by this he means the whole of Christendom) is a kingdom with

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4 Petrarch referred to the translocation of the papal government to Avignon, which lasted from 1309 until 1378, as the “Babylonian captivity.” And while there were some periods of increased bureaucratic efficiency during this period, especially the chancery and chamber, when it ended and the papal government was moved back to Rome, another period of difficulty almost immediately took its place. This period of difficulty, referred to as the Great Schism (1378–1417), was characterized by rival claimants to the papal throne. The Council of Constance (1414–1418) resolved the schism, but the papacy was left in a somewhat weakened state. Some recent historians, however, contend that papal power was not in decline during the Avignon period; rather, that it was at its zenith. For an analysis of the influence of Avignon on papal development, see P.N.R. Zutshi, “The Avignon Papacy,” in The New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. 6, 1300-c.1415 (Cambridge: 2000), 653–73.

5 Giles of Rome, De ecclesiastica potestate, (ed.) R.W. Dyson (New York: 2004). Throughout the treatise Giles claims that the pope is the rightful ruler and final judge of the entire world and that no one can exercise lordship over him.