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Thomas N. Bisson: The Crisis of the Twelfth Century

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Introduction

MEDIEVAL civilization came of age, so to speak, in a series of thunderous events on the eve of the twelfth century: the Norman Conquest of England (1066 and after); the Investiture Conflict (1075–85) with its settlements in France (1107), England (1108), and the empire (1122); and the First Crusade (1095–99) with its sequel of expeditions to the East. It would not be difficult to extend such a list—so as to include, say, the Christians' capture of Toledo (1085), the killing of King William Rufus (1100), or the murder of Count Charles the Good (1127)—for these, too, were events widely noticed by clerks and monks keeping records of faith. Our own perceptions are derived through these sources from the interests of contemporaries in the greater world about them, a world they could see daring new enterprises, expanding, outgrowing. And it is safe to say that what most interested people who lived through these conspicuous events was their witness to the experience of power.

There was something portentous about them. Normans and English alike knew why the 'long-haired star' had appeared in April 1066:¹ it presaged the most successful dynastic enterprise of the age. Starkly scandalous was the spectacle, a decade later, of the king of Germany prostrate before an inexorable pope, for was not the king the Lord's anointed?² Something of their zeal had to

¹ 'Worcester Chronicle' (D), ASC I, 195; *The Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Lucien Musset, tr. Richard Rex (Woodbridge 2005) scenes 31–33 (176–79).

² *Das Register Gregors VII.* iv.12, ed. Erich Caspar, 2 vols. (Berlin 1920–23) I, 311–14 (tr. Brian Tierney, *The crisis of church & state, 1050–1300* [Englewood Cliffs 1964] 62–63).

be spent before cooler heads could devise the compromises in which lay and spiritual powers came to be distinguished with new conceptual precision. And it was the palpably momentous phenomenon of fighting men in successive waves taking up their crosses in Christ-imitating self-denial that inspired a flock of chroniclers to write of the First Crusade: a 'strong movement [*motio valida*],' remembered one of the knights, 'through all the Frankish regions.'³ These were events capable of striking people with wonder, with fear. Many felt vaguely that their collective destinies were affected. Moreover, these events projected great men to admire. Countess Adèle of Chartres had a tapestry depicting the Norman Conquest, her father's immortal exploit, hanging over her bed; she who would have to urge her husband Count Stephen to return to the crusading expedition he had ignominiously abandoned.⁴ Valour, however problematic in mortals, created power, became the celebration of power in the exploits of those who won battles or kingdoms. One wrote of them, of their 'deeds' (*gesta*); sang of them: of William the Conqueror, of the Angevin counts, of Boleslaw 'Wrymouth' of Poland, of the Cid, of Prince Louis of France;—of Charlemagne. One took little interest in their means to power other than military exploits. Power tended to be conceived personally, charismatically. Indeed, it attached mysteriously to those who had it, who embodied it; to those who might themselves be 'powers' (*potestates*); to others, more numerous, who shared or aspired to it. Heroism was for these 'powers' to exemplify, for the masses to admire.

It was not necessary to be a hero to rule in this world. A more concrete form of power, something more like 'force' (French: *puissance*) had come to be the qualitative test of nobility: the power to command and punish, to coerce. This was, theoretically and historically, the power of kings, and remained so towards 1100. It was, accordingly, official power, an attribute of the royal

³ *Gesta Francorum*, ed. Rosalind Hill (Oxford 1972) 1.

⁴ R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen 1135–1154*, 3d ed. (London 1990) 1–4.

function objectively defined. Kings (and emperors) topped the hierarchy of powers in Christendom. But dukes and counts were also ‘powers (*potestates*)’; so were marquises and (in most regions) viscounts: all those, in short, whose attributes and (as a rule) blood perpetuated the administrative and social elites of pre-millennial times. In some highly problematic way the powers exercised by the old aristocracy were official and public as well as patrimonial; and we shall need to consider where in the conceptual spectrum their more specifically feudal action falls, for that was an issue for them as well as for us. But power was felt more than it was analyzed. While it may be of moment that some sense of public order persisted, even in heavily feudalized zones,⁵ we may also imagine that peasant-tenants and vassals experienced a great noble’s will or disposition in variable ways having little to do with status, and that patrimonial circumstances—hereditary right and the economic viability of estates and matrimonial and parental fortunes—could be hardly less important qualitative determinants of his power. Of a great lord’s power. For it goes without saying that powers judicial, fiscal, coercive, and paternal were, above all, powers of lordship.

‘Lordship’ in this book refers diversely to personal commands over dependent people who might be peasants in quasi-servile status or knights or vassals having or seeking elite standing; the word also denotes the value or extent of such dependencies (patrimony, *dominium*). The lordship held by nobles accounted for much of the exercise of licit power around 1100.⁶ It is tempting to include in this category the temporal dominations of prelates: bishops, abbots, priors, and the like. These were often the brothers or nephews of the old elite, nobles themselves; and even those of lesser blood, ever more numerous in time, must have been

⁵ See below, ch. III.

⁶ Elite power is quite differently treated by David Crouch, *The birth of nobility. Constructing aristocracy in England and France 900–1300* (Harlow 2005). As with much other terminology, my references to ‘nobles’ (‘nobility’) accord with the sources in a normally untechnical sense of ‘elite’ or ‘aristocracy.’

influenced by models of clerical office. But the complication here is that, as a rule, prelaties of this age were electoral and thereby exempt from one of the temptations to exploitative lordship. The question will arise how far clerical principles of associative action and decision-making affected prevailing structures of lordship in the twelfth century; but it will be safe to begin by recognizing that deference and obligations amongst the clergy were profoundly influenced by the recognition of qualitative differences between men. Power attached to persons, to repeat, and this was so even when, as conspicuously with the clergy, self-proclaimed unworthies held offices by God's grace. Offices, however real in theory, were animated by lords (kings, bishops, counts, etc.) whose power was effluent in expression, affective in impact. As for human collectivities, it does not appear that they were yet normally powerful as such.⁷ Associations and communities could be found everywhere in the age of the First Crusade. They had legal or even administrative functions notably in the uplands and peripheries, cultural functions (as in drinking gilds) perhaps more widely but more silently. But in the great European heartlands, communities were more or less suspect to those with (licit) power. Only clerical congregations living according to rules were fully acceptable: that is, associations subject to lord-prelates or themselves exercising lordship, attaining collectively at best to some recognition of rights as distinct from powers. Yet for all this the empowerment of communities becomes part of the story before us.

Seen in this way, the ordering of powers was marked by systemic stability. People knew their place in the hierarchies of church and principality, secure in the assurance that 'there is no power but from God' (Romans xiii.1). The religious and secular orders remained mutually reinforcing even as they became jurisdictionally distinct following the Gregorian reform. While many thought spiritual power intrinsically superior to secular, everyone

⁷ See generally to the contrary Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and communities in western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford 1984).

could see that the church depended on the support and protection of lay men for its survival. Nor could anyone doubt—least of all following an apparently radical proposal in 1111 to divest imperial churches of their regalian possessions⁸—that the church was an aggregate of landlords. Like the temporal world. A tendentious reflection had it that society was formed of three orders of people—those who fight, those who pray, and those who work. Peasants, the many who worked, could hardly have arrived at such a view.⁹

But they could understand it. Power was order. People celebrated order in processions, assemblies, councils. Still in the twelfth century, as in the ancient church, bishops vied with one another for visible precedence.¹⁰ These were not political disputes; they were concerned with status, not process. Much the same might be said of the attitude of great lords, lay and spiritual, towards their domains: God-given wealth to be used, described, retained. Domesday Book was more than a *descriptio* (and was surely a stupendous achievement), but how much more? What could one do with it? Could the order it projected be suffered to change? And a further question, even more pertinent, arises here: were there people with power but without status? Any who wished to change existing order? One fact should be underscored: the concept of the three orders, so far as we presently know, lost ideological force towards 1100. It seemed descriptive, not polemical; it was not challenged as such.¹¹ There was something ideal about the order of elite powers that flourished in the twelfth century. The empire recovered, the monarchies grew richer and stronger and fostered more sophisticated theories and means of power. Or so it seems. Was it really so? Let us rather ask whether

⁸ Colin Morris, *The papal monarchy. The western church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford 1989) 159.

⁹ Georges Duby, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris 1978; tr. Arthur Goldhammer, *The three orders* . . . [Chicago 1980]).

¹⁰ e.g., Hugh the Chanter, *The history of the church of York, 1066–1127*, ed. Charles Johnson, rev. Martin Brett *et al.* (Oxford 1990) 22.

¹¹ Duby, *Trois ordres* (*Three orders*), Eclipse.

contemporaries thought it was so. Was this elite order exempt from the spectre of disorder?



FEW CAN have thought so. The epigraphic events we started with were not only expressions of power but also, diversely, tests of, threats to, or violations of social order. They were, indeed, manifestations of violence, although this would have been less obvious to contemporaries than it is to us. All societies think of disruption when recalling salient events; with us, too, assassinations of the great vie with wars for notoriety. What Hannah Arendt spoke of as the ‘arbitrariness’ of violence was even more commonplace in the eleventh century than today; and the commonplace was easy to overlook by those exempt from the suffering it caused, by the few with power, and by us.¹² Power was exercised violently in the societies that concern us, so that if the cruelties incident to conquests and crusades seem epiphenomenal, they were nonetheless expressive of a preponderant reality of human experience. Allusions to violence are so deafeningly frequent in records of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that historians have been tempted to tune them out as self-serving clerical exaggerations; it has been proposed that *violen-tia* may not always mean what it seems in the sources.¹³ But it is safe to say that those astride horses and bearing weapons routinely injured or intimidated people in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Not always without purpose. Violence was a means of attaining as well as exercising power. The horsemen of Old Catalonia threatened and seized from peasants to create lordships and win knightly respectability. The Ermbald clan in Flanders, having achieved power without respectability, murdered the count they feared might undo them. The social crisis that ensued may be likened not only to the virulent collapse of royal protectorates in Galicia (1112–17) and in

¹²Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the republic* . . . (NY 1972) 110.

¹³See Stephen D. White, ‘The “feudal revolution”: Comment 2,’ *Past & Present* no. 152 (1996) 209–14.

England (1139–50) but also to a series of symptomatic urban uprisings: Cambrai (1076), Le Mans (1077), Laon (1112), and Santiago de Compostela (1117). It is usual, and hardly unjustified, to interpret these latter as anti-seignorial revolts; but it looks as if the rebels merely thought the wrong lords were in power.¹⁴ So we pass from violence to social stress, to normal situations of less or more repressive order vulnerable to assaults from the castle above or occasionally, if seldom, from the people below.

What most profoundly threatened the existing structure of power was the dynamics of social and economic change: increasing population and wealth and the multiplication of people with the means and will to coerce others. In the old passing world nobles had ruled, and nobles were few. In the burgeoning new world of the First Crusade more and more castellans and knights were pretending to noble powers and, inevitably, status. Characteristically, their ambitions exceeded their resources, thus predisposing them to the use of coercive force not only against their own peasants so as to secure a sufficient patrimony for the militant ease they craved, but also against the lands and peasants of others so as to entice fighting men to the rewards of their service and fidelity. Men fought for lordship, or for shares in it, and they learned to despise the peasants they felt compelled to exploit. Incipient nobility could be pitiless—and precarious. Were lord-princes to resist such vicious men?—or co-opt them?

In the event, they did both, appointing them to vicariates, shrievalties, or even curial functions against promises of fidelity, while seeking, almost everywhere in vain, to control the building of castles. The militant ‘new men’ were arguably more critical to the making of medieval government than the clerical ones made famous by Orderic Vitalis and his modern interpreters, for the former had to be taught the difference between fidelity and competence.¹⁵ And this lesson courtiers of whatever station found

¹⁴Below, ch. IV.

¹⁵OV xi.2 (VI, 16). Generally Ralph V. Turner, *Men raised from the dust. Administrative service and upward mobility in Angevin England* (Philadelphia 1988).

hard to teach, and often, it seems, hard to learn. They were used to thinking in terms of largesse, generosity, and the custom of fixed patrimonies; were quite unused to the concept of 'increase [*incrementum*]' and its economic implications. The men who supplied the lord-count's table or who provisioned his entourage must often have been as tempted to overlook the failings of a customary system from which they themselves profited as to recommend a new way of reckoning that would enable their master to profit from patrimonial growth.

And there was a deeper level of tectonic stress. New notions of militant lordship had taken root in societies more nearly converted to Christianity than ever before. This produced a contradiction that distressed principled clergymen, who questioned not only a seemingly worldly trade in altars but also the deportment of prelate-lords with tenants, vassals, and pretensions. When their reform movement was carried to the extreme of attacking the king's customary control of episcopal appointments, the conflicting ideals of opposed conceptions of power were speedily deployed in conflict. The Investiture Conflict was the first and most celebrated incident of a prolonged crisis of power. Marking a newly self-conscious maturity in European affairs, it had many facets, as historians have well seen; two of these have notable bearing on the theme of this book. First, the conflict was destructively violent, undermining royal authority in Germany while subjecting the people of Rome to merciless pillage by the pope's Norman allies. Second, writers drawn to justify actions or claims gave expression to ideas about authority, office, election, and competence (or suitability) that were to win renewed currency in the twelfth-century church and must be supposed to have influenced those, themselves often clerics, at work in kingdoms and lay principalities as they were fitted out with institutions.¹⁶ Out of this 'crisis of church and state,' to employ the usual but problematic

¹⁶ Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, state and Christian society at the time of the Investiture Contest*, tr. R. F. Bennett (Oxford 1940); Morris, *Papal monarchy*, chs. 4, 5, 7-9.

term, came the organizing of ecclesiastical government. Might not a crisis, in considerable measure the same crisis, have played its part in the beginnings of lay governments?



VIOLENCE, DISORDER, stress: the problems of traditional powers in western medieval lands arose chiefly from societal growth and change. They might indeed be called 'growing pains' were it not for the inadequacy of the developmental metaphor. There was a confused old head on this young body, addled with conflicting venerable views of world order that had been incompletely reconciled in the compromise over investitures. The bellowing anger of a lord-king could provoke the murder of an archbishop as late as 1170—and two other archbishops would suffer Becket's fate in the next quarter-century. Here again *libertas ecclesiae* rang forth, the old issue of the two powers; but what really links the after-shocks in England and Catalonia is a new distress about fidelity, oppression, and remedies for violence. And if, as has been plausibly argued, John of Salisbury wrote about tyranny with the young Henry II's fiscal exploitation of the English church in mind, then his *Policraticus* merits a conspicuous place in a flood of complaints against wilful violence, to say nothing of its well-known contribution to the new genre of courtly satire. John's equivocations about tyrannicide may be said to betray a learned clerk cowering before the lord-king he would correct.¹⁷ But if the *Policraticus* is thus an ideological witness to the excesses of lord-rulership, it also helps us to understand why disorders and tensions of this age other than that of the two powers have not much interested historians. In John's philosophical exposition, ideas seem disengaged by comparison with the polemics of the Investiture Conflict and of Becket's exile. This appearance may not be entirely justified, but it

¹⁷Jan Van Laarhoven, 'Thou shalt *not* slay a tyrant! The so-called theory of John of Salisbury,' *The world of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford 1984) 319–41.

is true of so much else written about power in the twelfth century as to suggest one considerable heuristic difficulty of this inquiry: a certain discrepancy between the structural integrity of lordship as represented in theory and the perceptibly problematic character of lordship as we know it in practise.

Those who reflected on power drew on a cluster of familiar ideas, a field of moral discourses derived from the biblical-patristic inheritance, from common talk and the literary expression of militant lay values, and from a new infusion of classicising theory. It was held as axiomatic that all power was from God, that it was justly wielded on earth to remedy sin and wickedness and to protect the church, and that good and valiant deeds merited fidelity and honour. Kingship and prelacy were ministries or offices of God; good offices, that is, because tyranny was a perversion of the *deitas* a prince was held to have. Law, likewise subject to perversion, figures typically as a classical restraint on the ruler, and was, for John of Salisbury, a 'gift of God.'¹⁸ What is common to all such platitudinous allusions—as in early *chansons de geste*, letters and *arengae* of educated clerks, and the *Policraticus*, for example¹⁹—was a virtual equating of power with *dominatio*, or lordship; of human power with the only form of power God was conceived to possess. But this is conceptually sophisticated lordship: an expression of public power, official and utilitarian, with no implied antithesis between arbitrary will and social purpose. John of Salisbury defines tyranny as 'violent lordship,' by which he means wilful or lawless rule.²⁰ Moreover, this whole administrative conception of lordship evokes a deeper strain of scriptural and patris-

¹⁸ *Policraticus* iv.1–2, ed. C. C. J. Webb, 2 vols. (Oxford 1909) I, 235–37.

¹⁹ e.g., *Le couronnement de Louis* . . . , *laisses* 1–10, ed. Ernest Langlois, 2d ed. (Paris 1966) 1–6; *LPV* I, no. 97; John of Salisbury, *Policr.* iii.10 (I, 205); iv.1,4,6 (I, 235–37, 244, 250–57); v.7 (I, 307–15); vi.1 (II, 2–8). John, however, seldom uses the words *dominatio*, *dominus*, which have for him the resonance of wilful power such as he can safely attribute only to God.

²⁰ *Policraticus* viii.17 (II, 345–46): 'Est ergo tyrannus, ut eum philosophi depinxerunt, qui uiolenta dominatione populum premit, sicut qui legibus regit princeps est.'

tic admonitions: Christ's differentiation between domination and service, with the implied paradox that lords should serve; or Saint Benedict's comparably paradoxical prescription of the abbot who must take counsel but may then act as he wills; or Saint Gregory's psychological exposition of the pastoral office.²¹ Also scriptural was the inherited doctrine of accountability, which likewise projected a norm of administrative lordship.²²

It would be difficult to exaggerate the tenacity of these ideas in a self-renewing religious culture. Yet much in them seems out of touch with secular realities. As will become clear, this is what we should expect. John of Salisbury, sublimely wedded to his Cicero, Ambrose, and (he claimed) Plutarch, tells us he drew his tyrant from the 'philosophers,' although his depiction might well fit the bad castellan of his day. The studied conception of lordship had preserved principles of early medieval public order; Carolingian notions of rulership and administration. In the absence of any willing or premeditated assault on those principles, they had survived intact. They can be read verbatim in Galbert of Bruges' lament for the life and programme of Count Charles the Good—and Galbert was a notary engaged in the most down-to-earth life of Flanders.²³ Yet the reality beneath the platitudes must have been different. Flanders was burning. . . .



THE REALITY was not simply that power, stress, and violence were *experienced* personally, palpably, physically. They were

²¹ Matthew xxiii.10–11; John xv.15; *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. and tr. Justin McCann (London 1952) cc. 3, 63 (25, 143); Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis*, parts 1 and 2, *PL* LXXVII, 13–50.

²² Matthew xviii.23, xxv.19; Luke xvi.2.

²³ Galbert of Bruges, *De multro, traditione, et occisione gloriosi Karoli comitis Flandriarum* cc. 1–12, ed. Henri Pirenne, *Histoire du meurtre de Charles le Bon, comte de Flandre (1127–28) par Galbert de Bruges . . .* (Paris 1891) 1–22; also Jeff Rider (Turnhout 1994) 2–33; (tr. James Bruce Ross, *The murder of Charles the Good*, rev. ed. [NY 1967] 81–114).

thought likewise in the doing of things. Power meant lordship and nobility, the precedence of one or (very exceptionally) a few, in the twelfth century. It was realized in submission, alliance, paternity, friendship, and ceremony; in petition, oath, or witness; in one's lord's presence, in his castles, his districts (our very word evokes the *distringere* of seigneurial constraint). It was felt mysteriously in the priested rituals of promise, bonding, festivity, consecration, ordeal, and rejection. It was felt as violence: seizure, rape, intimidation, extortion, arson, murder; felt painfully, that is, in the prevailing weakness of protection and justice. Power was *not* felt, nor was it habitually imagined, as government.

No lesson of medieval history has been so victimized by conceptual anachronism as this one. Generations of scholars, including those writing of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, have spoken of medieval 'government' or the 'state' without hesitation or explanation. Excellent scholars, to be sure. Much of what is presently known about the history of power in the twelfth century was discovered by the likes of Achille Luchaire, L. L. Borrelli de Serres, W. A. Morris, C. H. Haskins, Heinrich Brunner, Heinrich Mitteis, H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles. They gathered evidence for the origins and semblances of offices, institutions, legislation, and policy. We learned from them how power was exerted in shire-courts, in the production of coinages, in the levy of danegeld. But they wrote of such things not only as public services, which in some sense they surely were, but also as political institutions. More cautious than some, Joseph R. Strayer synthesized this work as 'the medieval origins of the *modern* state' (my stress) and thought of state-building as only beginning towards 1100; yet he also believed that feudalism was a form of government.²⁴ Most historians of institutions spoke (and speak still) of government as if all societies have it and *we* know what it is. There seemed no need to define the thing, an omission per-

²⁴*Medieval origins of the modern state*; see also Strayer's *Feudalism* (Princeton 1965) 13.

haps encouraged by familiarity with sources in which words (and their derivatives) like *administrare*, *gubernare*, *regere*, *regimen*, *res publica*, and *status* occur frequently. One moved easily to the appropriation of concepts from the vocabulary of the modern state: administration, political power, party, 'machinery of government,' etc.

None of these concepts is warranted by what we know of Europe before 1150. Not even the classicising clerics who spoke of *administratio* or *res publica* tried to abstract a definition of government from their summations of the attributes of good rulership. Nor should very much be made of their secularising of social purpose: 'rule yourself by laws,' exhorted Archbishop Hildebert to the count of Anjou about 1123, 'and your subjects by love'; and John of Salisbury insisted on the delegacy of the material sword by the church.²⁵ What these prelates saw clearly—and here they were fully *au courant*—was that if the prince's will (*voluntas*), by which he was potentially a tyrant, could be limited by law, then his power could be redefined as service to subjects: specifically (in Hildebert's formulation) justice, the equitable securing of rights, and help for the afflicted. In effect, they proposed to put traditional kingship back into princely lordship, to essay a civil (or even 'political') ideal of justice in place of a personal-proprietary one. This was progressive thinking, as Sir Richard Southern well saw; scholars familiar with Cicero and Seneca 'were opening up a new vein of political theory, based on human rights and needs, and the innate dignity of the secular order of society.'²⁶ Their public-legal usage is very suggestive in this regard. Abbot Peter the Venerable of Cluny thanked Bishop Henry of Winchester for 'having put aside so many entanglements of your commonwealth [*res publica*, i.e., in England]' in order to visit Burgundy around 1134.²⁷ It looks as if Peter thought of lord-princes and their ministers as functioning in a public order, of ruling people territorially.

²⁵ *Ven. Hildeberti epistolae*, PL CLXXI, 182; John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* iv.3 (I, 239).

²⁶ *Making of the Middle Ages* 95.

²⁷ *LPV* I, no. 59.

Archbishop Hildebert put the matter more concretely, recommending that Count Geoffrey take satisfaction in 'administration' and service in the *res publica*.²⁸ That in some sense a public order persisted in Europe cannot be doubted.²⁹ But how were such images related to the reality of power? Was a cowed shire-court an institution of state? Was the lord-king who dispensed favour exercising justice politically?

The trouble with assuming that power was experienced publicly and institutionally is that it closes our eyes to inconvenient evidence. Consider a more specific example. Messrs. Richardson and Sayles, who severely castigated William Stubbs for his failings, were at pains to show, no doubt correctly, that the appointment of Roger of Salisbury to supervise justice represented a resourceful innovation by King Henry I. Yet when they added, gratuitously, that Henry 'creat[ed] the office of justiciar' and 'conferred . . . the title of chief justiciar' on Roger, they themselves went beyond the evidence, victims of preconception.³⁰ What the records show is simply that a competent clerk of the lord-king's entourage was entrusted with an important new function. Is this so small a point? As our authorities themselves say, 'Roger of Salisbury is an outstanding, a mighty, figure in English history.'³¹ Yet we know nothing directly of his function, let alone 'office'; only something of (a very few of) his acts. Silence can play tricks on us, but we must not forget to listen to it. People in the shires knew that Bishop Roger was powerful, that he wielded the king's lordship; neither he in his writs nor they seem to have insisted on any appellation other than that of 'bishop'—and that *was* an official title. It is an engaging complication of this inquiry that power

²⁸ *PL* CLXXI, 181–83 (partly quoted by Southern, 95).

²⁹ This is a main theme of Alan Harding, *Medieval law and the foundations of the state* (Oxford 2002).

³⁰ H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The governance of mediaeval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta* (Edinburgh 1963) 157; see also 157–68; and compare Judith Green, *The government of England under Henry I* (Cambridge 1986) ch. 3.

³¹ Richardson and Sayles, *Governance* 165.

could be conceived—or at any rate, envisaged—diversely in given situations.

By holding to the concept of power, we may have better hope of knowing an office when we find one. Indeed, the main objection to the study of medieval government as such is that it underestimates the extent and significance of institutional change. If the behaviour of insubordinate Catalan barons in the 1190s seems sociologically different from that of their ancestors in the 1050s, was that behaviour political in both cases? If government and politics are (indeed) constants in human affairs, then (of course) they changed historically; but in such a scenario historians may be overly tempted to suppose continuity and incremental growth while discrediting evidence of disruption or transformation. Current thinking about the anarchy under King Stephen seems to betray this temptation—as well as uneasiness about it.³² Contemporaries may have been oblivious to procedural novelties, and tiresome about wickedness, but when they speak of violence in unexpected contexts we should pay heed. The famous letter of Archbishop Hildebert cited above contains an extended coda on the old theme of the good prince ill served by bad ministers. This passage is as remarkable for what it leaves out as for what it says. It says the prince will be held accountable in God's judgment for his failure to 'repress the rapacity and exactions of your [ministers]'—(the stark *tuorum* is eloquent)—without so much as hinting that terrestrial accountability would be a convenient remedy.³³ What matters is not that the 'government' here exhorted is rudimentary, for that is manifest; but rather that power in this *res publica*, even in its ministries, is conceived as personal lordship.

If politics fitting the proto-humanist prescriptions could be found in or alongside the lordships of this turbulent world, they were few and far between. The most nearly permanent one before

³² See *The anarchy of King Stephen's reign*, ed. Edmund King (Oxford 1994); and *King Stephen's reign (1135–1154)*, ed. Paul Dalton, Graeme White (Woodbridge 2008).

³³ *PL* CLXXI, 183.

1150 was the papacy, with its increasingly bureaucratic resort to law and legates, and its routinizing response to petitions and pleas. But the Roman church was an elective monarchy founded on ancient precepts and tradition; it was in this sense a survival from the pre-Gregorian public order, although quite arguably it took the de-worldifying crisis of the eleventh century to stimulate the administrative innovations that came after. In any case, we know the papacy of this age from its own records, progressively collegial in impulse, standard in form. In Germany and Italy imperial justice and patronage had never wholly lost their official natures. It was otherwise in dynastic-feudal lay societies, in which privileges were typically drafted by beneficiaries, courts were recorded as occasions, and where it may well have required the demise or absence of lord-princes to contrive something like government as a temporary expedient. Orderic Vitalis tells us that while their count was imprisoned in 1098, the barons of Maine held daily counsel wherein the *status* of the *res publica* was discussed and provided for.³⁴ Yet here again classicising verbiage (not to mention a long lapse of time) may have distorted the reality. It was one thing to devise a vice-gerental function in an expanding realm, as in the case of the English justiciarship; quite another to institute a collective lay lordship, let alone acephalous baronial republics. The inter-regnal troubles of 1127–28 in Flanders, in which precocious efforts to distill a general interest from partial ones were made, may be more indicative than the less surely attested occasion in 1098. Communal independence was notoriously ephemeral in northern France, all but unheard of elsewhere north of the Alps.

So it was in lordships, and notably those of princes and kings, that principles and mechanisms resembling those of public administration first became perceptible. Exceptions to this assertion must not be overrated. Some early communal governments in Italy were characteristically precarious, to the point of needing rescuers. One looked elsewhere for educated courtiers; and by

³⁴OV x.8 (v, 240).

1200 their political assumptions would have seemed increasingly realistic to those who had property to lose in Catalonia and in the lands dominated by Philip Augustus, as well as in England. Statutory judicial procedures were taking hold in England. New functions, fiscal accountability, and something like lawmaking become visible in all these lands. But there was nothing inevitable about this, not even in an organic sense. What *was* inevitable was the radical survival, not to say triumph, of personal lordship, the only conceivable implement of nobility, then more prestigious than ever. The well born prevailed affectively³⁵ as well as functionally; no wonder servants emulated them. It cannot have been easy, given economic and patrimonial constraints and ambitions, to redefine fidelity in impersonal ways to public ends. That is why accountability was fundamental to the crisis of the twelfth century—the ‘critical’ issue, very precisely speaking. For on this point the disparity between moral imperative and arbitrary actuality was most acute, the biblical precepts least effectual for seeming beyond hope of realization. And it was on this point that the experience of violence converged with that of power, for the tolerance of violence prevailing in lordships of the twelfth century helps to explain the equally characteristic tolerance of imprecision in the performance of service to the powerful.



THE PROBLEM to be addressed in this book is how and why the experience of power became that of government in medieval Europe. The objective validity of this problem in no way depends on a distinction between lordship and government. Medieval government arose, with some exceptions, or revived, within lordships. The ways of this transformation were not always violent, yet they were strewn with conflicts arising from what may reasonably be regarded as a crisis of unlike mentalities. The antagonism

³⁵ That is, by dint of personal-emotional engagement or influence. See Glossary for this concept.

was never explicitly defined, nor even perhaps clearly grasped, save as a conflict between good and evil; and while it is unfashionable today to attend overmuch to the moralities of power, it would be cruelly misleading to ignore them in this book. If as a rule the free laity aspired to militant valour and domination—to *noblesse*, that is—, they were ever ready to taste of peace in fear for their souls. We hear of good lords in the twelfth century, yet sometimes having, like Ansold of Maule, to define their power in contrast to that of tyrants.³⁶ If as a rule the clergy espoused the values of competence, office, and peace, they were too engaged with the world, as the reformers found to their sorrow, to be fully redeemed. Archbishop Manasses I of Reims was the object of repeated charges of lordly exploitation and violence against the abbot and monks of Saint-Remi.³⁷ Popes like kings were lords (*domini*), none more so than Gregory VII, who could be likened in hostile hyperbole to a brutal master of helpless serfs.³⁸ But people were not accustomed to abstracting principles from immediate aims; and when in one of the rare instances where *we* can discern something like an ideological confrontation in practise, in late twelfth-century Catalonia, the outcome of the struggle was bizarrely pragmatic: a victory of barons addicted to violent lordship over legislators on the high ground of peace. In that land the crisis was prolonged.

The crisis of the twelfth century was one of conflicting aspirations in disparate multiplied populations: aspirations for lordship and nobility, and for justice. Government and the state were to be, in some senses, its resolution. The recognition of societal needs and of judicial remedy, persuasion to tenets of collective utility and management in place of exploitation: such things arose with the uneasy survival of lordship. Yet the origins of govern-

³⁶ OV v.19 (III, 194), discussed below, p. 65.

³⁷ C. Stephen Jaeger, 'Courtliness and social change,' in *Cultures of power. Lordship, status, and process in twelfth-century Europe*, ed. T. N. Bisson (Philadelphia 1995) 297–99.

³⁸ Text cited in further context below, p. 207.

ment can only incidentally be our subject. Since contemporaries appear to have lacked an empirical understanding of government (or the state) as distinct from lordship, it seems equally useless to define the phenomenon or to insist on it. No one knew when (s)he had it. What matters here was, and is, the becoming, the transformation: the history of violation, complaint, and response; of pacification, remedy, and legislation; of an unsteady adjustment between function and office; of a flickering recognition of the difference between fidelity and competence in ministerial service. What was normally lacking in the twelfth century was self-conscious action, including lawmaking, in the interest of subjects; the recognition of offices as impersonal and accountable; and the understanding of competing interests as legitimate and negotiable. None of these elements was incompatible with lordship. Some or all would develop within lordships as also in communities. All of them were implied by classical and patristic theories of power revived after 1050, familiar to many, yet perhaps more persistently ethereal than we have realized. Max Weber's differentiation between patrimonial and bureaucratic dominations remains conceptually useful, not least for suggesting how these observed types of power are not necessarily opposed absolutely, nor necessarily historically sequential. Yet his insistence on 'political' behaviour and on office in all types of domination seems to miss an historical reality very characteristic of the twelfth century.³⁹ For the same reason it has seemed inadvisable to follow recent social scientists and their adherents in referring to all relations of power as 'political,' a usage not merely negligent of the classical etymology but also, as already suggested, oblivious to one of the salient shifts in the social experience of medieval power.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth, Claus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley 1978) I, 215, 221, 237, 241, 252; and II, ch. 9.

⁴⁰ e.g., William Ian Miller, *Humiliation and other essays on honor, social discomfort, and violence* (Ithaca, NY, 1993); Stephen D. White, 'The discourse of inheritance in twelfth-century France: alternative models of the fief in "Raoul

An historical study of power will nonetheless inevitably seem beholden to modernism. The very concept is social scientific even if the medieval word *potestas* lends itself to unmediated historical interpretations. Even the historical reflections on power by anti-modernist Michel Foucault betray their sociological genesis.⁴¹ Modern notions of class, culture, ritual, liminality, literacy, identity formation, strategic action, and process are only a few of the pertinent aspects of the historical situations here in question. But with the partial exceptions of culture and literacy, theoretical constructs per se are less useful to the present inquiry than 'thick descriptions' and their implications such as may be found diversely in James C. Scott's work on southeast Asian peasants or in Alexander Murray's study of reason and society in medieval Europe.⁴² Norms were changing—were 'becoming'—in the heavily lorded societies of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At least one new one—the mind-set of castellans and knights in some areas—does not easily conform to the model of feud constructed by legal anthropologists,⁴³ compelling me to hold to the problematic evidence without forcing it. What it suggests is that vengeance, however constant even if seldom obvious in nonliterary sources, cannot alone explain an abrasive experience of power. One result of this will be to complicate the map of cultural chronology (which may, after all, be the historian's task).

de Cambrai", *Law and government in medieval England and Normandy . . .*, ed. George Garnett, John Hudson (Cambridge 1994) ch. 6; Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: building states and regimes in medieval and early modern Europe* (Cambridge 1997); and Esther Pascua Echegaray, *Guerra y pacto en el siglo XII. La consolidación de un sistema de reinos en Europa Occidental* (Madrid 1996). These works, together with Harding, *Medieval law and the state* (2002), make valuable contributions to the study of power in perspectives different from mine.

⁴¹ See for this purpose (Michel Foucault) *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, tr. Robert Hurley *et al.* (London 1994) 1–89 ('Truth and juridical forms' [1973]).

⁴² James C. Scott, *The moral economy of the peasant. Rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven 1976); Alexander Murray, *Reason and society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1978).

⁴³ Max Gluckman, 'The peace in the feud,' *Past & Present* no. 8 (1955) 1–14, followed by much other work; see also Barthélemy as cited in next note.

So there can be nothing categorical in my approach to a subject problematic at once in its nature and its transformation. Is it a matter of 'norm' or 'construct' that human suffering seems related to power in Europe's twelfth century? The evidence of distress, like that of violence, no longer seems so easy to read as it once did,⁴⁴ yet without it too much is missing. Even in this distant age, the powerless are not quite voiceless. Their perspectives become part of the challenge of imagining how power worked in societies unlike our own. From these societies survive traces—something of their words and artifacts—for whatever we can make of them, in records to be explained, not explained away. In this survival we may hope to discern how people experienced power in the twelfth century. And perhaps even how that experience changed.

⁴⁴ As appears from the influential works of S. D. White and D. Barthélemy, of which the following are but the merest sample: Stephen D. White, 'Repenser la violence: de 2000 à 1000,' *Médiévales* xxxvii (1999) 99–113; Dominique Barthélemy, *Chevaliers et miracles. La violence et le sacré dans la société féodale* (Paris 2004).