

b. Growth of the Political Structure

While this is more properly a matter for church history, it is not inappropriate to mention the general outlines of the subject at this point. The ecclesiastical picture grew from the concept of church and state as two arms of God for the governing of mankind. (This view prevailed among most of the reformers, incidentally.) The vitality of the church would be somewhat dependent on the power of the state: if the state were vigorous in persecution of its duties, the church was more limited in its outreach; when the state was weak the church was challenged to have a more active role in the governing process. At times both were strong, at others both were weak. Our treatment of the total subject at this point will be wildly superficial and those who are more competently informed will have to hold their irritation to a later time.

Gregory I (590-604), while not the first militant pope, was in many ways the most successful in establishing the political ideal of Rome. Reacting against Norman and Lombard threats to the peace of Rome and not having the support he had hoped for from the eastern emperor, he organized an army, so to speak, and took up for the city. In most aspects he acted as a civil ruler and his organization was fundamental to the deliverance of the city-state from the barbarian aggressors. Gregory also undertook the civil government of the city and established the church as the "ruling body" in Rome. Gregory attained more than any of his predecessors (save possibly Leo I) in bringing the churches of the west into the Roman communion and securing the submission of their leadership to himself.

The logical successor in political growth was Zachary (741-752?) under whose aegis Pepin was more or less consecrated king of all the Franks. (The actual celebration was set up by Zachary but not completed at the time of his death.) In this way the bishop of Rome became a kingmaker and at the same time one to receive the favor of kings. As with the other bishops of his time he was interested in the expansion of the papal political power and the territory of the Vatican states. Support of mission work among the Teutons helped to bring those people to the nominal submission to the Roman bishop.

John XII, while an incompetent and immoral pope (955-964) (only 16 when consecrated to the office) brought the strategem to pass that allowed the bishop of Rome to designate one of the temporal rulers "emperor of the Holy Roman Empire." Charlemagne had been recognized as "king of the Romans" in 800 AD and the idea of an imperial power strengthening the church was hardly new. But this creation came close to placing a civil power in a position of authority over the ecclesiastical powers. The particulars that mark this episode are ruggedly hard to get a grip on and further reading would be necessary for the complete picture. But the imposition of clerical rule on the civil authorities is very pronounced and the aspirations of the coming bishops will make it a mandatory situation.