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The Approach of the Millennium

1 Glad Confident Morning

‘When evil doers had sprung up like weeds, and wicked men ravaged the vineyard of the lord like thorn bushes and briars choking the harvest, the abbots and bishops and other holy men decided to call a council at which confiscations (*praeda*) would be forbidden, what had been taken unjustly from the churches would be restored, and other blemishes on the face of the holy church of God scraped away with the sharp blade of anathema. The council was summoned to the monastery of Charroux and great crowds of people went from Poitou, the Limousin and neighbouring regions. The bodies of many saints were brought along to reinforce the pious by their presence and dull the threats of the wicked. The divine will, moved as we believe by the presence of the saints, illuminated that council by frequent miracles.’¹

In this spirit, according to Letaldus of Micy, on 1 June 989 the monks of Nouaillé bore the most precious possession of their monastery, the relics of its patron saint Jouin, to a great meeting at Charroux, fifty kilometres south of Poitiers. Monks, and lay people of both sexes, summoned by Archbishop Gunbald of Bordeaux and other clerics, including the bishops of Poitiers, Périgueux, Limoges and Angoulême, came to demand the help of God and the saints against the evils of the times. They resolved that (unless the judgement of a bishop was being enforced) three classes of wrongdoers should be excommunicated: anyone who infringed the sanctuary of a church, or took anything from one by force; anyone who took from a farmer, or any other poor person, an ox, a cow, a calf, a goat of either sex or a pig; and anyone who assaulted or carried off an unarmed clerk, or forcibly entered his house.² The source of the evils against which these measures are necessary is precisely

identified by the fact that the arms whose absence gave title to this protection were specified as those of a trained knight: shield, sword, breastplate, mailcoat.

The following year the Archbishop of Narbonne called together the bishops of his province, and a number of leading laymen, including the vicomtes of Carcassonne, Béziers and Narbonne, to condemn the 'noblemen who not only seized the lands of churches, but behaved in them with the utmost brutality'.³ In 994 the Archbishop of Lyons presided over a council at Anse in Burgundy at which an even more imposing list of lay and ecclesiastical dignitaries placed a long list of properties of the great abbey of Cluny under the protection of anathema, prohibited clerks from hunting, priests from marrying, and those who were married already from celebrating mass, forbade buying and selling on Sundays (except as much as might be eaten on the day itself), and prescribed appropriate abstinence for laymen on various fast days.⁴

This was the beginning of the movement now called the Peace of God. During the next forty years similar councils were held in the lands south of the Loire, spreading north later in the eleventh century, and into Normandy, the Empire and Catalonia. Its character changed as it spread, and in the change as well as here, in its earliest and most overtly radical phase, it epitomised many of the problems which brought about the reconstruction of European society in the next two centuries, and the responses to them. In the early middle ages Peace had belonged to the king. The powers and responsibilities to enforce the peace assumed by these late tenth- and eleventh-century councils were royal prerogatives, and had been exercised for almost three centuries past by the kings of the Carolingian house and their officers. It was not coincidental that the Peace Councils began a few years after the Carolingian dynasty had been supplanted by the coronation of Hugh Capet at Reims in 987, for Hugh's title was not widely recognized in southern Francia. Conversely, those who supported him in the north looked upon the peace movement as an unwarrantable usurpation of the royal prerogative. When royal and princely power began to be reasserted in the later eleventh century responsibility for enforcing the Peace of God, together with the Truce of God (a set of constraints on private warfare which had come to be associated with the Peace), was again assumed by secular princes. The most forceful of them, William of Normandy, proclaimed it at the Councils of Caen in 1047 and Lillebonne in 1080, thus reintegrating it into the array of prerogatives which he wielded so vigorously as Duke of Normandy and King of England. Thus the history of the Peace of God represents, in one of its many aspects, the central theme of this book – how in the eleventh century power which had leaked away from the established institutions of an old world was used by a bizarre but temporarily effective alliance of church

and people to construct a new one, before being brought once more under control, to uphold the newly established social and political order of western Europe for many centuries to come.

The evidence for what happened at the Peace assemblies is so fragmentary that sometimes we scarcely know that they took place at all. Among the miracles of St Vivian of Figeac, for example, apparently compiled at the end of the tenth century, are some which occurred at a meeting at Coler in the Auvergne of bishops gathered to establish the peace and uphold the decrees of the fathers of the church.⁵ We have no other knowledge of this Council, but the reference, hopelessly imprecise in itself, serves to confirm a famous assertion of the Cluniac chronicler Radulfus Glaber that 'the bishops and abbots and other devout men of Aquitaine summoned great councils of the whole people, to which were borne the bodies of many saints and innumerable caskets of holy relics. The movement spread to Arles and Lyons, then across all Burgundy into the furthest corners of the Frankish realm. It was decreed that in fixed places the bishops and magnates should convene councils for re-establishing peace and consolidating the holy faith. When the people heard this, great middling and poor, they came rejoicing and ready, one and all, to obey the commands of the clergy no less than if they had been given by a voice from heaven speaking to men on earth.'⁶

We have references to twenty-six such councils between 989 and 1038, most of them in Poitou, the Limousin and the Berry.⁷ Their purpose is unambiguously asserted by the description of the meeting at Héry, in 1025. 'Crowds of common people without number, of every age and both genders, hurried there. In order that the devotion of these lay people might be increased on their journey men of faith began to bring the bodies of many saints as well. Along with such venerable relics [the monks of Montier en Die] did not neglect to bring along the relics of the holy body of our patron Bercharius, which were fittingly placed for their journey on a litter. This was done, moreover, so that our leaders could make a proclamation about a certain count, Landric by name, concerning the booty he had stolen from our blessed protector.'⁸

As Radulfus presents them, the novel character of the Peace Councils was that they were convened by clerics but attended by persons of all classes, and especially the humble, who swore on the relics to defend each other, the church and the poor, 'so that all men, lay and religious, whatever threats had hung over them before could now go about their business without fear and unarmed'. 'The robber and the man who seized another's domains were to suffer the whole rigour of the law', Radulfus continues; the sanctuary of the church was to be respected and the safety of clerics and those who travelled in their company guaranteed. Divine approval was signified by the miracles which

abounded on these occasions. 'Bent legs and arms were straightened and returned to their normal state, skin was broken, flesh was torn and blood ran freely.' Small wonder that 'such enthusiasm was generated that the bishops raised their croziers to the heavens, and all cried out with one voice to God, their hands stretched out, 'Pax! Pax! Pax!''⁹

As these quotations illustrate, the sources are perfectly explicit about the reason for this great eruption of passionate activity. The peace movement, as it is depicted here, was a response to social collapse, in which the monasteries led the poor in concerted defence against the anarchic conduct of the 'evil men who had sprung up like weeds', seizing the goods and animals of the poor, holding them to ransom and forcing them to work, especially on building the castles from which the usurpers imposed this reign of terror on the countryside. *Pauperes* (the poor) in the vocabulary of this age meant those who lacked power, rather than money. Monasteries and small landowners had a common vulnerability to unrestrained power, and a common interest in restraining it. But for the organizers of the Peace of God lawlessness on earth was only one manifestation of a greater disorder, a breach of the grand harmony of the universe on whose tranquillity, Augustine had said, the peace of all things depended.¹⁰ That is why in his account of the Peace movements Radulfus Glaber particularly stresses the agreement that everybody should abstain from wine on the sixth day of the week and from meat on the seventh: in this way each was individually committed to controlling his or her personal appetites in a manner that paralleled the restraint which, by collective action, they intended to impose upon the world and the evil-doers.

The resolutions for moral and religious reform were preserved in the lists of canons which in most cases are all the record of these councils that remains. The prescriptions of the earliest, like those from Charroux quoted above, appear somewhat arbitrary, though that may represent only the hazard of the record. Later they became increasingly elaborate, until they laid down a comprehensive programme which foreshadowed in all essentials and many details the much more famous programme of reform associated later in the eleventh century with the revival of the Roman papacy and the establishment and dissemination of new religious orders. Thus the council at Bourges in 1031, in addition to providing for the celebration of the mass in the churches every Sunday, ordained 'that no gift should be accepted by the bishop or his ministers in return for holy orders,' that 'laymen should not place priests in their churches except through the bishop,' and that 'no priest, deacon or subdeacon should have a wife or concubine', anticipating the fundamental prohibitions of simony, lay investiture and clerical marriage.¹¹

Those provisions of the Council of Bourges will seem very natural to anyone familiar with the general character of Catholic christianity and

its place in second-millennium European history. The celibacy of the priesthood has been considered by Catholics since the thirteenth century as indispensable to its sacramental and pastoral functions alike, and in modern times, though frequently controversial, has been widely respected by others as an essential attribute of European Catholicism. The bestowal of ecclesiastical office by laymen upon dependants or relatives has perhaps been too general a custom until modern times to evoke the same universal reprobation as the marriage of clergy vowed to celibacy, but irreligious historians as well as religious ones have almost always regarded the trading of benefices and office in the church, including ordination itself, as a self-evident spiritual and social evil, an 'abuse' of which a healthy and vigorous society would obviously wish to rid itself. Consequently, the extirpation of clerical marriage (nicolaitism) and of improper traffic in clerical office (simony) have usually appeared to later generations as manifestly and unambiguously desirable goals which would naturally attract widespread support.

These were the main objectives of the movement often described, after the greatest publicist and most controversial figure among its leaders, Pope Gregory VII (1073–85, previously Cardinal Hildebrand), as the Gregorian or Hildebrandine reform. They were placed firmly at the head of the political agenda during the pontificate of Leo IX (1049–54), and remained there until they were definitively entrenched as the framework of medieval Catholicism in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. By that time they had secured at least the acquiescence, and generally the vigorous support, of Europe's secular rulers as well as its clerical intelligentsia. The 'reform' which was embodied in the Gregorian programme was nothing less than a project to divide the world, both people and property, into two distinct and autonomous realms, not geographically but socially. In principle and increasingly in practice every community, from Christendom itself to the remotest hamlet, was to contain an independent clerical domain, with its own powers and functions, its own properties and incomes, its own laws, customs and jurisdiction, and its own membership, separated from others by a distinctive manner of life based on the rule of celibacy.

This meant reversing great changes which had taken place during the ninth and tenth centuries, both in expectations about rights in landed property and in actual possession and control over it. In Charlemagne's time as much as a third of land had belonged to the churches, and he had converted the payment of tithes from a spiritual duty to a legal obligation on all his subjects. In the century and a half following Charlemagne's death in 814 both land and tithes fell on a massive scale under the control of laymen. To recover these lands and revenues for the church was central to the endeavours of the reformers of the eleventh and

twelfth centuries. They met with very different degrees of success in different places, but their greatest success was in the areas which will most often be the focus of attention in this book, and especially in northern France. By the time of Lateran IV about one-fifth of Europe's cultivated land belonged to churches, and the church also claimed the right to one-tenth – a tithe – of every legitimate source of income. Distribution of both was uneven. The findings of the Domesday commissioners suggest that in 1086, 26 per cent of revenue from land in England was received by the monasteries, priories and cathedral churches, a good deal more than they had had in 1066.¹² A great deal more still would follow in the following century, as many hundreds of new monasteries, canonries and hospitals were founded and the process of returning or augmenting the revenues of cathedral and parish churches continued. At the end of the twelfth century the churches held perhaps one-third of the cultivated land of northern France, and probably about half as much in southern France and Italy.¹³ Even though in many places tithes were paid to lay proprietors, whose right to them was accepted by the church to varying degrees and on varying terms,¹⁴ this represented a massive, ostensibly voluntary and historically unparalleled surrender of power and resources by the lay nobility.

Such a division and redefinition of ecclesiastical property and rights on the scale suggested even by the lowest estimates obviously could not have taken place without equally profound and sweeping consequences on the other side. Lay society was and must have been redefined and reorganized to the same, revolutionary, degree. It is therefore impossible to describe or explain the changes which took place in the church without accounting for those that occurred in the world, and vice versa, though history – itself for long divided by the same events between the secular and the ecclesiastical – has frequently attempted to do so. (The distinction between secular and ecclesiastical history, like that between clergy and laity, is of course much older than the eleventh century: it begins in the fourth, with Constantine and Eusebius, as everybody knows. The argument here is not that the eleventh century invented these distinctions, but that it made them fundamental to European society and culture, for the first time and permanently.) Since this was the foundation upon which European civilization has been constructed it is not easy for Europe's children to remember that it might have been otherwise. Our history has been written by the victors in the struggle to bring this social order into being, in the certainty that their victory was right, and because it was right inevitable. By the middle of the twelfth century they dominated the record almost entirely, and their spiritual descendants occupied the commanding heights of European historiography until the enlightenment, and of much of European education,

including higher education, until well into the twentieth century. Consequently, the surrender of extensive territories, abundant incomes and the power which rested on them was recorded and has been widely accepted as the slow and painful recognition of the divine will by men and women persuaded by faith and the desire to conquer their own sin, of which their consciousness had been relentlessly and unceasingly raised by two hundred years of inspired evangelism and instruction. So understood it is indeed a remarkable story, of how a world of savagery, violence and greed was converted to altruism, idealism and service – a fitting birthright for a civilization destined to transform the globe. Without denying the sincerity with which such aspirations were cherished by many individuals, however, it will be necessary to consider the possibility that it was more complicated than that suggests.

2 The Faithful People

History seldom has much time for losers, but there were many at the time who did not think that all that this transformation entailed was right, in theory or in practice, and who did not see the replacement of the old world, in which the combination of secular and spiritual office and its rewards provided a secure and frequently harmonious basis for regional and local hegemonies, as either desirable or virtuous, much less inevitable. As the biographer of the hermit reformer Romuald of Ravenna remarked, ‘throughout the whole region up to Romuald’s time [the last decades of the tenth century] the custom of simony was so widespread that hardly anyone knew this heresy to be a sin’.¹⁵ More than a century later, after the Investiture Contest had been fought and won, Norbert of Xanten would agree to accept the provostship of St Martin at Laon only if he could maintain his vow ‘to live a fully evangelical and apostolic life’, which would forbid, among other things, recourse to secular justice, or to the use of anathema, in defence of the church’s property. ‘I do not refuse the charge, provided that the canons who occupy that church are willing to abide by such a way of living.’ The canons were appalled. ‘We do not want this man over us, for neither our customs nor those of our predecessors would recognize such a master. May we be allowed to live as we do now: God wishes to castigate, not to mortify.’¹⁶ Resistance to ‘reform’ was long, desperate and bitter not only because the material interests of the resisters were threatened but because many of them believed just as sincerely as their opponents that justice was on their side, and that they were fighting to sustain an ancient and honourable traditional order against anarchy and confusion. Whether or not the outcome of the long struggle was in

itself a triumph of virtue it was, and must have been, also a triumph of force.

To those who brought about the reforms, one essential point was never in doubt. At every stage their demands were supported by 'the faithful people' – in other words the force of popular opinion backed by the threat, and sometimes the reality, of popular action.¹⁷ The crowd which flocked to Charroux was for the next century and a half a regular actor on the stage of European affairs. The Council of Reims, in 1049, when Leo IX used the occasion of the consecration of the new basilica of St Remigius to demand, with spectacular results, that the assembled prelates swear on the relics that they had not paid for their offices is often taken as the opening of the Papal reform movement. It was attended by great crowds who flocked from far and wide to cheer on the reformers, and bring pressure to bear on the unfortunate prelates whom they targeted. In May 1057 a sermon preached at the translation of the relics of St Nazzarro precipitated a rising in Milan, and opened a period of almost twenty years for which the city was dominated (though not controlled) by the Patareni, who installed their own priests in many churches in place of those whom they considered corrupt, held the Archbishop at defiance, and generally acted as trail-blazers of the Gregorian reform.¹⁸ At Florence in 1068 an immense crowd watched a Vallombrosan monk named Peter – thenceforth, Petrus Igneus – walk through the flames to vindicate the relentless campaign which his abbot, Giovanni Gualberti, had waged for many years against the bishop of Florence.¹⁹

Nothing more clearly expresses the revolutionary character of the pontificate of Gregory VII than his willingness to invoke popular opinion and pressure against the hierarchy over which he himself presided:

We have heard that certain of the bishops who dwell in your parts either condone or fail to take notice of the keeping of women by priests, deacons and sub-deacons. We charge you in no way to obey these bishops or to follow their precepts . . .

those who have been promoted by the simoniac heresy . . . may no longer exercise any ministry in holy church . . . Those who obtain churches by the gift of money must utterly forfeit them . . . Nor may those who are guilty of the crime of fornication celebrate masses or minister at the altar in lesser orders. . . . If they disregard our rulings, or rather those of the holy fathers, the people may in no wise receive their ministrations, so that those who are not corrected from the love of God and the honour of their office may be brought to their senses by the shame of the world and the reproof of the people.²⁰

These phrases do not in themselves imply that Gregory VII called the masses to revolt. When he addressed 'the people' of a diocese he had in

mind the local aristocracy, and *fideles* in the context of these letters is generally taken in the secular sense to mean landholders, who represented respectable society rather than the population at large. Nonetheless, it was clear enough what such appeals might lead to, and that the Patarenes also called themselves *fideles* does imply at the very least a degree of carelessness on Gregory's part, for he was certainly familiar with the language of such circles, and can hardly have been indifferent to the implications of using it. When, at Cambrai in 1076, a priest named Ramihrdus whose anticlerical preaching had incited popular unrest was examined for heresy his answers were theologically impeccable, but he refused to confirm them by receiving the sacrament 'from any of the abbots or priests or even the bishop himself, because they were up to their necks in simony and other avarice'.²¹ Whether or not Ramihrdus actually had Gregory's licence (like Wederic of Ghent, who was also preaching in Flanders, with similar effect²²), he certainly echoed Gregory's commands, and the Pope reacted with fury when he heard that the bishop's servants had burned Ramihrdus alive in the hut to which he had been confined after his examination. As for the people, 'many of those who had been his followers took away some of his bones and ashes for themselves. In some towns there are many members of his sect to this day [c.1133], and it is thought that some of those who make their living by weaving belong to it.'

The tactics which Gregory VII and his associates used both in their deliberate and organized encouragement of the Patarene movement in Lombardy and Tuscany and in attacks on the old ecclesiastical order elsewhere were revolutionary in the classical sense that they called upon underlings, clerical and lay, to sit in judgement on their superiors, and to withdraw obedience if they found them wanting. Such judgements were generally arrived at not through formal legal process, but by traditional tests of popular reputation and standing in the community. Petrus Igneus survived the flames at Florence; in Cambrai Ramihrdus did not – and both, in consequence, were vindicated in popular esteem as men of outstanding holiness. If Petrus had been burned and Ramihrdus survived the results would have been the same. The significance of the judgement of the flames was not in the 'objective' issue of whether the flesh could withstand them, but in the fact that the outcome was capable of being interpreted in such a way as to express and sustain the verdict of the community.²³

In this light insistence on clerical celibacy was particularly apt to throw power into the community, since chastity is almost invariably incapable of proof, and therefore must be almost always a matter of reputation. How else could it be decided, and by whom, whether the woman who looked after the daily needs of the priest was his housekeeper or his

concubine? That is the judgement which Gregory in effect called upon communities everywhere to make, and why his pontificate was remembered as a time when all Europe was astir, when public affairs were the gossip of street corner and market place, and when 'those who are called the leaders of Christendom' incited 'sudden unrest among the populace, new treacheries of servants against their masters and masters' mistrust of their servants, abject breaches of faith among equals, conspiracies against the power ordained by God'.²⁴

The enlistment of popular enthusiasm in the cause of reform had not begun in the pontificate of Gregory VII, and did not end with it. For some decades to come preachers like Wederic and Ramihrdus continued to appear in various parts of Europe, excoriating the sins of the clergy and rousing the people against them. In the 1090s two of the fieriest, Robert of Arbrissel and Vitalis of Mortain, were commissioned by Pope Urban II to preach the crusade in the Loire valley. This access of respectability did nothing to moderate the vigour of their assaults on married and simoniacal priests, whose effect, Bishop Marbod of Rennes complained, was 'not to preach but to undermine'.²⁵

Such enthusiasm could easily overstep the bounds of doctrinal orthodoxy, or appear to do so. The blacksmith Manasses of Ghent, who as the Patarenes had done in Milan led a crowd to expel a married priest from his church and take it over for worship in the style approved by the reformers, was said to be associated with another talented assailant of the greed and corruption of the unreformed clergy, Tanchelm of Antwerp, who attracted such crowds and such enthusiastic support that for some years before his death in 1115 nobody dared to arrest him. Tanchelm is generally described as one of the most notorious heretics of the early middle ages, on the basis of a letter in which the Canons of Utrecht urged their archbishop not to release him from captivity. But Tanchelm had been respectable enough, and accomplished enough, to represent the Count of Flanders on a diplomatic mission to the papal court, by whose cynicism and venality impeccably Catholic observers were regularly appalled, and the Canons of Utrecht were among the targets of his rhetoric. Their account of how Tanchelm celebrated his own marriage to a wooden figure of the Virgin is calculated to arouse scandal and dismay, but their letter contains nothing precise to sustain the charge of heresy against him.²⁶

Tanchelm is often coupled with another famous rabble rouser, Henry of Lausanne, who led a popular revolt against the clergy of Le Mans in 1116, and presided for some weeks over a communal regime there.²⁷ Henry became one of the most effective and articulate heretical preachers of his generation. Thirty years after he left Le Mans it needed the best efforts of Bernard of Clairvaux, supported by a string of miracles, to

loosen support for him in the Périgord and Toulousain, where for many years he had spread his message to such effect that he left 'churches without people, people without priests, priests without the deference due to them', holy days uncelebrated, children unbaptized and the dead unshriven.²⁸ A monk named William, otherwise unknown and unidentified, has left an account of a debate (most probably conducted in public) which he had with Henry during this period. It reveals Henry as indeed a radical and a heretical theologian, who denied with articulate vigour the need for the intercession of the church, its clergy or its sacraments between people and their God, and had set out his views in a book from which William quoted several times in the course of the dispute.²⁹

That is not to say, however, that Henry was an avowed heretic in 1116. If he had been it is unlikely that he would have sent emissaries before him to ask the permission of Bishop Hildebert of Lavardin to preach in Le Mans – in itself an acknowledgement of the episcopal authority whose denial was the acid test of heresy – and inconceivable that Hildebert would have granted it. Hildebert too was a reformer, a friend and patron of Robert of Arbrissel, and found himself, like many another, frustrated by the recalcitrance of his cathedral chapter, men placed in their comfortable stalls by family patronage, and little disposed to give up their comforts for the sake of a distant pope or a vulgar enthusiasm for spiritual athleticism. One of them, Guillaume, was nicknamed '*qui non bibit aquam*' – 'who doesn't drink water'. Some such tension within the chapter is at any rate hinted at by the fact that some of the younger canons of Le Mans greeted Henry with delight, built a platform for him to speak from, and sat weeping by his feet as he denounced their sins and those of their older brethren, 'his speech resounding as though legions of demons spoke from his open mouth'. He spoke with such effect that the people rose against the clergy, their lords, and for several weeks Henry came and went as he pleased, holding meetings and promulgating his fearsome teachings while the clergy were afraid to act against him.³⁰ Two of these young clerks left the city with him, later to be received back and forgiven by the bishop, after Hildebert, on his return from Rome, had succeeded in reasserting his control and driving Henry out. It may be difficult to envisage a bishop encouraging such an assault on his own chapter, but it now seems that as much as sixty years later almost exactly the same combination of circumstances led to the emergence of a heretical movement and reputation far greater than Henry's when Valdès of Lyons (another city still backward in its commercial development at the time) was encouraged by Archbishop Guichard of Pontigny to raise popular pressure against the sustained resistance to reform of the cathedral canons, only to be disowned and forbidden to preach by Guichard's successor.³¹

Ironically enough, when Bernard of Clairvaux travelled to the Périgord in 1145 to undo Henry's work one of his preliminary tasks was to settle a similar and long running dispute between the Archbishop of Bordeaux and the canons of the cathedral of St André, whom the Archbishop had tried to persuade to embrace the common life – that is to say, to give up their wives and their individual shares of the cathedral's income. 'They had resisted it to the point of being excommunicated for seven years. Because of this the Archbishop had been exiled from his see for five years, leaving the church empty, and they had resisted his return violently.' Here, in contrast to Le Mans, the town supported the chapter – 'The hatred of the people for the Archbishop was so great,' says Bernard's secretary Geoffrey of Auxerre 'that when we entered the town they reviled us all, because we were his supporters. . . .' There could be no more eloquent testimony of the stubbornness of these provincial grandees in clinging to their positions than the fact that the most eloquent persuader in Christendom had to settle for a 'compromise' by which the canons kept their stalls, which fell into the common pool only when they died – and was glad enough to have done so for his secretary to describe it as a triumph 'worthy to be called a miracle'.³²

Behind all of these struggles one issue predominated. In the tenth century the wealth of a cathedral church, often the greatest landowner of its region, appeared to the nobles of the locality as one of their most important resources. The arrangement made at Milan in 983 was replicated with varying degrees of completeness and formality throughout Latin Europe: the Archbishop bestowed the lands of his cathedral as fiefs upon the greatest families – the *capitanei* – of the region, from whose sons were drawn the upper clergy of the diocese, including the canons of the cathedral, who in turn elected the Archbishop himself – usually, of course, from among their own number. What was to them, as it would have been to the neighbours of an Indian temple or an Egyptian mosque of their time, a perfectly ordinary and elegantly self-sustaining system of elite support, appeared to reformers, led from the middle of the eleventh century by an increasingly articulate, energetic and prestigious papacy, as a scandalous and spiritually devastating depredation of the church, the root of a corruption so profound, as Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida proved with coruscating passion in his *Books against the Simoniacs* (c.1058) that it threatened to rob Christendom of validly ordained priests, and with them all hope of salvation. The business of reform was by no means so rapidly completed as the reformers demanded – it never is – or as the almost universal acceptance of their case within a generation or so (in the sources which now survive) is apt to suggest. Throughout the twelfth century, in one diocese after another, the moment arrived when a new bishop infected with the idealism of the

new age – a Hildebert, a Gumbald or a Guichard of Pontigny – confronted a chapter still wedded (all too literally perhaps) to the ways, and worse still the values, of the old.

An even more famous and complicated affair which was nevertheless rooted in the same problems led in 1155 to the execution of Arnold of Brescia, a preacher of legendary eloquence, austerity and purity of life whose ferocious and devastating analysis of the corruption of the papacy placed him at the head of a civic revolution in Rome which was inevitably, and ruthlessly, suppressed by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Where Arnold differed from Henry of Lausanne and Valdès was not so much that his intervention (like that of the Patarenes at Milan) was uninvited, as that he continued to lead the Roman people in revolt after a compromise had been reached between the Pope and the noble families on the division of wealth and office between the two from which, as happens on these occasions, the people who had supplied the muscle of the commune were excluded.³³

In this respect as in others the Peace of God had foreshadowed the papal reform movement. From the Patarene rising in Milan through the pontificate of Gregory VII and locally in many parts of Europe right up to the 1140s and beyond, popular pressure under religious leadership was repeatedly and essentially brought to bear on secular magnates who failed to surrender lands and tithes to the church, and on bishops and clergy who failed to acknowledge or implement the new prohibitions on simony, clerical marriage and personal wealth. After the middle of the twelfth century enlisting the people in the cause of reform was no longer a regular or acknowledged strategy, though as we have seen it was by no means abandoned. Up to that point it had been indispensable, though except in Gregory VII's time generally disowned, or at least disguised, after the event. That did not mean that there was no price to pay for it, or for abandoning it.

3 The Gifts of the Saints

In taking the relics from their crypts and parading them through the countryside the abbots and bishops who led the Peace of God entrusted their cause to its surest protectors. 'Under the awesome shadows of the long dead heroes of the faith' the clergy of Roman Gaul had rallied their flocks against the dangers of a lawless age, and buttressed an authority more precarious than it looks in retrospect to implant their faith and the new values it stood for in a backward and recalcitrant countryside.³⁴ When a sixth-century archdeacon went to clear himself of adultery by swearing his innocence at the tomb of St Maximin at Trier, but confessed

his guilt at the last moment because he dared not enter the presence of the saint with the intention of perjuring himself, he showed very well that for some purposes at least waning public authority, formerly embodied in imperial codes and officials, might be effectively replaced by public witness and well founded terror of the consequences of wanton defiance of public opinion.³⁵ He also felt the sharpest of the weapons that would in the eleventh and twelfth centuries banish clerical marriage (if not altogether clerical concubineage) from the Latin west.

Every fragment of the saint – a shin bone, a finger nail, a hair of his beard – contained his whole being, and guaranteed the presence which had become indispensable to Christian worship. Charlemagne laid it down that churches which had relics should build special oratories to contain them, and Louis the Pious that every church must have one if the mass were to be celebrated there.³⁶ The enthusiastic pressing of old bones on every gullible northerner who visited Rome that resulted, and the fortuitous discoveries of forgotten saintly graves in increasingly improbable locations, culminating in that of the head of St John the Baptist at Angély, near Poitiers, in 1010, have provided abundant material for the gibes of the irreverent since Guibert of Nogent remarked that since there was also a head of the Baptist at Constantinople at least one of them must be a fraud, unless he had two heads.³⁷ But a more substantial significance had been revealed by Einhard two hundred years earlier when, after recounting the dubious manoeuvres by which he secured the relics of Saints Peter and Marcellinus for his abbey of Seligenstadt, he described their reception in the various churches to which he sent them, and especially the effect of the miracles which they brought about. ‘While the accounts of these and many other workings of God’s miraculous power were spreading through the towns and districts [near Aachen] a woman from the land of the Ripuarians who had been blind for a long time . . . asked to be taken to that chapel’, and others came from nearby Jülich, Eschweiler, and Gangelt; after a miracle at Hesbaye, ‘a great crowd of people poured into that meadow and a throng from the surrounding area gathered to give thanks on behalf of the man who had been cured . . . they kept watch all night long, and the whole area resonated with the praise of God’; at St Bavo (Gent) invalids in search of cure from fourteen named villages came or were brought to the relics; when they reached Maastricht, ‘a vast crowd of people had gathered to receive them. They came out from the town blessing and praising God for his vast and ineffable mercy in deigning to visit through such great patron [saints] a people who believed and depend upon him’, to be rewarded by a string of cures; and so on.³⁸ In all this, it is easy to see how the relics drew people into the Christian community and helped to translate, as it were, Charlemagne’s lofty ideal of presiding over a

community of the baptized into a practical reality. 'As is quite clearly evident in the preceding pages,' says the *Book of Ste. Foy* at Conques, 'St. Foy's power was traversing the farthest regions of the universe and was leaving behind no-one untouched by her gifts.'³⁹

Above all the saint was the special protector of his (or her) people, who paraded his relics in the fields to ward off flood or drought, or around the walls of Paris or Tours as their last hope of escaping Viking pillage. When the monks of St Philibert of Tournus quarrelled with the Count of Autun in the 940s and left, taking the relics with them, catastrophe followed in the form of bad harvests, high prices and epidemics, until a great public meeting implored the monks to come back.⁴⁰ The power of relics to draw people from far and wide – 'crowds of innumerable people from all directions', 'invalids and sick from great distances as well as from the neighbourhood', 'great numbers of both sexes from the dioceses of Lyon, Autun, Vienne and Macon', 'many people from various regions' and so on⁴¹ – was not at odds with this passionate identification with particular communities. On the contrary, it shows why the relics were put more to use as the power of kings declined. To carry the saint to a newly donated property and march in solemn procession around its boundaries as she received it formally into her care, to bear her solemnly to a farm or building that had been violated by some marauding grandee, and to perform these ceremonies before crowds of witnesses from far and wide, was the best possible way to claim possession, and sometimes the only hope of defending it. Once again Bernard of Angers explains, in the *Book of Ste. Foy*:

It is a deeply rooted practice and firmly established custom that if land given to Ste. Foy is unjustly appropriated by a usurper for any reason the reliquary of the holy virgin is carried out to that land as a witness in regaining the right to her property. The monks announce that there will be a solemn procession of clergy and laity, who move forward with great formality carrying candles and lamps. A processional cross goes in front of the holy relics embellished all round with enamels and gold, and studded with a variety of gems flashing like stars. The novices serve by carrying a gospel book, holy water, clashing cymbals, and even trumpets made of ivory that were donated by noble pilgrims to adorn the monastery.⁴²

No wonder that 'the report of this procession had spread far and wide'. The creation of order which lay at the heart of the church's role in the world was inescapably a theatrical affair. The procession's direct and immediate objective was to secure the interests of Ste Foy, but in doing so it also offered a dramatic representation of the triumph of the saint and her united, precisely ranked and brilliantly arrayed entourage over the dark forces of anarchy and usurpation. In and through this

drama the monks did their work in the world as well as securing their own precarious place in it.

Hence the cult of relics is, among other things, a sharp reminder that the Abbot of a great Benedictine house in the tenth century, however much he might long for the *vita angelica* or the *vita contemplativa* prescribed by his rule and demanded by his critics, had about as much chance of achieving it as the Rector or Vice-Chancellor of a modern university has of devoting himself to a life of scholarship. The abbot found himself at the intersection of a series of frontiers – between the monastery and the world, between the powerful and the poor, between heaven and earth, between the living and the dead – which demanded constant policing, intercession and interpretation. He was always on stage. When in 1067 Abbot Hugh of Cluny confronted Count Geoffrey the Bearded of Anjou to secure the return of property seized from the monks of Marmoutier ‘words availed him nothing, nor was he ashamed to go on bended knees, or grovel at his feet. He assumed every form of supplication by which mercy might be wrung from cruel power...’ – and his warning that Geoffrey should not dare to leave the palace while deaf to Hugh’s pleas was awesomely fulfilled when on doing so Geoffrey lost his throne to the revolt of his brother, Fulk Rechin – an event widely regarded as a turning point in the history of the Angevin dynasty.⁴³

Hugh resorted on this occasion to a particularly impressive version of one of the most valuable and flexible items in the repertoire of political gesture, the *clamor*. Having recently been the subject of particularly sensitive and wide-ranging studies this rite illuminates several corners of our stage.⁴⁴ In late antiquity and Carolingian times the *clamor* was recognized as the way in which the poor – those who did not enjoy the protection of powerful men, specifically including widows, orphans and monks – could bring their tribulations to the attention of the public official, magistrate or Count, who was held to have special responsibility to protect them. Its use by the mighty Abbot of Cluny, one of the most powerful men in Europe, constituted a paradox similar to that in which, in another version, monks would lay the relic of their patron saint on the floor of the church, surrounded by thorns, and hurl execrations upon him for failing to protect them in their calamity. A few years after overthrowing his brother, Count Fulk Rechin was shamed in his turn, this time into compelling one of his knights, Odo of Blazon, to make restitution to the monks of St Trinité of Vendôme for the crops he had stolen from them, after the monks had prostrated themselves in prayer, day after day, before the crucifix laid among thorns on the floor of their church.⁴⁵

These are examples of the liturgical virtuosity which the great monasteries had developed by their dedication to the *opus dei* that patterned

the lives of their monks and in the eleventh century inspired the renaissance of church building that, in Radulfus Glaber's famous words, clad Europe in a white cloak of churches. The same elements were blended in the Peace of God, in this respect a particularly dramatic example of a familiar and traditional means of enlisting popular support for monastic objectives, and against the enemies of the church, especially and most regularly those who tried to seize its lands or revenues. The novelty of the Peace of God lay not in its individual elements, but in the coordinated participation of so many people from different regions and dioceses, often brought together from considerable distances, and repeated on many occasions over a period of several decades. On every occasion the exercise depended for its effect on presenting the monks as *pauperes* against the *potentes*, appealing to the solidarity of the former and the shame of the latter. The public appeal to the relics, in the fields as in the *clamor*, was the ultimate expression of the alliance between the church and the poor.

4 An Age of Miracles

'This is not an age of miracles' remarked the biographer of Gilbert of Sempringham in the late 1190s.⁴⁶ It may seem an odd thing to have said at a moment when the pursuit of miraculous cures, at countless local shrines as well as Canterbury and Compostela, was soaring to new heights of popularity, but Gilbert's biographer was implicitly and somewhat apologetically comparing his master's modest achievements while alive with those of the many spiritual heroes of the previous two and a half centuries, from Gerald of Aurillac (d. 909) to Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153). In doing so he acknowledged the distinction between miracles performed after the death and in the lifetime (*in vita*) of the saint, for the lives of many of these earlier heroes describe an impressive repertoire of miracles not merely recorded at their tombs, but performed before enthusiastic or terrified crowds in the full vigour of their maturity.

Miracles abounded, as we have already heard from Radulfus Glaber, when the relics of the saints rallied the faithful to the Peace of God. They were, indeed, eagerly anticipated in these turbulent years not only on great public occasions when church and people came together to defend their liberties against the arbitrary violence of the powerful, but whenever the distress of the poor was to be relieved, the sick to be cured, the helpless to be helped, in whatever ways might display the power of God, and confirm the legitimacy of His earthly representatives. As Bernard of Angers said, 'people hungered for banquets of miraculous and renowned deeds'.⁴⁷ If the brothers of Vallombrosa received a gift of bread when

through the steadfastness of their refusal to eat meat they were on the verge of starvation, it was a miracle; if the peasant girl whose clear skin threatens to overwhelm Gerald of Aurillac's devotion to chastity appears ugly and deformed in his eyes at the very moment when she is at his mercy, it is a miracle; if a bear which had been killing cattle showed itself at the command of Giovanni Gualberti so that it could be killed it was a miracle; if a tree which Romuald against all advice ordered to be felled refrained from toppling on to his cell, and his hungry disciples found fish in a part of the river where fish rarely appeared, these were miracles; if a monk who had lost his voice recovered it in time for the Christmas services it was a miracle; if, in fact, any success or good fortune fell upon anyone at any time, and in relation to the manifold activities of his or her life, it might have been due to a miracle.⁴⁸

That list echoes Edward Evans-Pritchard's classic evocation of witchcraft belief among the Azande of the Sudan in order to show how if good fortune is substituted for ill, popular belief in the miraculous worked in very much the same way and served very much the same purposes in the early medieval west as the beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery which have been so widely observed in more recent face-to-face societies.⁴⁹ This does not mean that the people with whom we are concerned had no such beliefs of their own. Although as Christian writers they did not care to dwell on them, the authors of our sources from the time of Gregory of Tours and Bede up to Burchard of Worms at the beginning of the eleventh century and beyond contain many references both to popular belief in charms and spells, bewitchment and malevolent magic, and to individuals who were credited with magical powers – magicians, soothsayers, rainmakers, necromancers and so on.⁵⁰ The examples above show how easy it would often be to read the standard repertoire of miracles as reversing or undoing precisely the sorts of misfortune that might be attributed to witchcraft, though (as far as I know) no such suggestion is made explicit in the sources. The idea of the miraculous provided a counterpart to that of witchcraft, and in doing so made it possible to distinguish clearly between holy power that was legitimately possessed and exercised, and fraudulent or illicit alternatives.⁵¹

The daily expectation of miracles was not peculiar to the Christian west, or to this period. The problems of everyday life – the sickness of children and animals and the accidents that befell them, the threats to precarious subsistence from the failure of crops or the vagaries of fire, storm and flood – and their beneficent counterparts in cure and relief, or the unexpected bounty of nature – were common to all agrarian societies, though they may have been even more than usually pressing anxieties in a world which was, as we shall see, undergoing a profound transformation in its means of subsistence. Nor was there anything

new or particularly unusual in the attribution of supernatural powers, for good or evil, to particular individuals. These have been and still are commonplace in peasant societies the world over. What has varied considerably is the extent to which and the manner in which such beliefs are recorded. That may tell us a great deal, since it is directly connected with the attitude adopted to them by religious and political authorities as well as by the cultural elite, which controls what reaches the written record.

Unlike their predecessors in the age of Gregory of Tours and Bede, Carolingian churchmen were little disposed to take much notice of what they regarded as popular superstition, and wrote their saints' lives without adding the miracles which became almost universal in the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵² Odo of Cluny was anxious to minimize this aspect of the reputation of Gerald of Aurillac (d. 909), and was clearly uneasy about the cult which had grown up at Gerald's tomb. 'I have put my faith in the words of witnesses who have recorded not many of the miracles, which ordinary men (*vulgus*) think of great moment, but rather a disciplined way of life and not a few works of mercy pleasing to God.'⁵³ Or as Odo's own biographer, John of Salerno, put it, 'let those who like to do so praise exorcists, raisers of the dead and all the other people famous for miracles. I will praise patience as the first virtue of Odo'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, on the basis of Odo's *Life*, Gerald must be considered as inaugurating the new age of miracles *in vita* of which Odo himself, like all his successors as Abbots of Cluny down to Hugh the Great (d. 1109) emerges as a powerful exponent.

John's reference to exorcists and raisers of the dead and Odo's to the *vulgus* show what was at stake. To define sanctity in terms of the christian virtues – patience, a disciplined way of life, works of mercy – was to retain the power of definition securely in the hands of men like Odo and Gerald themselves. Their obvious embarrassment at the miracles associated with their heroes is a decisive argument against dismissing such stories in this and the next four or five generations as literary conventions which reflect no real events. On the contrary, Odo would have been delighted and relieved if the careful inquiries which he made of those who had known Gerald in his lifetime had enabled him to shrug off these tales as mere superstition, just as Gregory of Tours and his brother bishops in the sixth century had dealt swiftly with the pretensions of the displaced holy men from the Byzantine world who occasionally turned up in their well-ordered western dioceses. As Bernard of Angers says, addressing his *Book of Ste. Foy* to his master Fulbert of Chartres – a stout champion of episcopal authority in difficult times – 'Partly because it seemed to be the common people who promulgated these miracles of Ste. Foy and partly because they were regarded as new

and unusual, we put no faith in them and regarded them as so much worthless fiction.⁵⁵

Sometimes, however, the enthusiasm of the people was not so easily dismissed. Bernard later explains why during vigils in the church of Ste Foy the illiterate who could not join in the chanting of the psalms were allowed to 'relieve the weariness of the long night with little peasant songs and other frivolities' which might seem, at first sight, to derogate from the decency and dignity of the holy vigil. When Bernard, as a visitor from the sober north, asked in chapter why this was allowed the Abbot told how in his youth the monks decided to forbid 'the unsuitable commotion made by the wild outcries of the peasants and their unruly singing'. Finding that they were unable to enforce silence during services they ordered the doors of the church to be closed at night, and the swarms of peasants to be refused admission to the vigils, until one night a crowd of pilgrims larger than usual appeared 'shouting and demanding that they should be allowed to come inside the walls of the monastery'. Then, 'suddenly while we were sleeping the bars of the doors were spontaneously unfastened' and 'when we rose in the middle of the night for matins we found the church so full of people keeping the vigil that each one of us had difficulty forcing his way forward to his own station'.⁵⁶

We may doubt whether the bars were really unfastened of their own accord, but some of the monks suggested that perhaps the opening of the doors had been a miracle. On reflection others saw the strength of their case. As the Abbot put it, 'If I reassess my own attitude carefully in the light of what you have told me I am satisfied that on account of the simplicity of these people an innocent little song, even a peasant song, can be tolerated somehow. For it may be that if this custom were abolished the crowds that frequent the sanctuary would also disappear. Nevertheless, we should not believe that God rejoices over a little song; it is the hardship of keeping vigil and the good will of simple people that please Him.'

This story illustrates not only how the decision to acknowledge a miracle – here, to account for the bursting open of the barred door – might assist a community to reconcile disagreement or difficulty without loss of face to those who lost the argument, but also how wise leaders adjust themselves to the realities of social power. Similarly, Odo of Cluny stylized the miracles told about Gerald of Aurillac to make them conform to the standard repertory which echoed the life of Christ not as an embellishment to bring his subject up to an expected standard of sainthood, but on the contrary to domesticate, even sanitize, and legitimate a burgeoning local reputation – a reputation among the common people – that wasn't going to go away. The implication of

Odo's embarrassment, therefore, is that what is new in the prominence of miracles in the hagiography of the post-Carolingian period is not so much the activity which they reflect as the fact of their reception into the written record, by which they are conceded, albeit with visible reluctance, a place in the world of high culture.

So far as the miracles associated with shrines and relics are concerned such reluctance was shortlived. Everybody knows with what flair and vigour the medieval church encouraged, or exploited, popular enthusiasm for them, to the point where it seemed, in the words of Achille Luchaire, that the worship of relics, sustained by the miracles associated with them, was the true religion of the middle ages.⁵⁷ This was by no means the case of miracles *in vita*, whose prominence in the record, as we have seen, occupies a relatively short and clearly defined period. They do not disappear entirely after the middle of the twelfth century but, as Gilbert's biographer told us, they are few, unspectacular, and above all marginal to the activity of the saint in his lifetime, and, compared with the miracles recorded at his tomb, to his posthumous reputation.

On this reading of tenth- and eleventh-century saints' lives, however, we must suspect that the popularly acknowledged miracle-worker enjoyed a much greater degree of continuity in fact between late antiquity and the high middle ages than the Latin sources care to record. Odo of Cluny's ambivalence towards the living miracle worker is the same which his predecessors as leaders of the church in Gaul had long felt towards a power which could be neither ignored nor acknowledged – the power of the community expressed through its chosen leaders, for its chosen purposes.⁵⁸ The bishops of the twelfth century, like their predecessors of the ninth, would seize their opportunity to lock away in the shrines the *mana* of the saints which had been released by the crumbling of ancient structures of authority. Meanwhile it had a necessary but hazardous role to play in laying the foundations of new ones.

Both the necessity and the hazard are made manifest in the qualities which were attributed to the holy men by the actions and events which those around them chose to acclaim as miracles, and which proclaimed their worker not only as a holy man, but as possessing powers and qualities which have an altogether more precise significance. Though careless of his own safety and well-being, the living saint enjoys a wide immunity from misfortune against both human and natural calamity, which is extended also to his possessions and his followers. He feeds and if need be clothes his followers, and protects them from danger. His benevolence and protection are extended also to the poor and helpless, whose quarrels and conflicts he resolves, and on whose behalf he intervenes against the arbitrary and extortionate behaviour of the mighty and

their officials. His ordinary demeanour is gentle and unassuming, but his wrath is quickly aroused against those who contest his authority or defy his judgement, and his curse terrible in its consequences, as to the 'certain proud and haughty Count' who, scorning Romuald's instruction to return the cow which he had seized from a poor farmer, choked to death on its meat. On another occasion a bailiff takes the cow from a *muliercula* (poor woman) who goes to the church and prays to Romuald; the bailiff is struck by an arrow (!), lets the cow go, but dies when he gets home. In the context of the period the portrait thus painted is unmistakable.⁵⁹ These are the qualities and powers of lordship. And what underlies the saint's ability to protect his people and punish their enemies is that he himself, like other lords, enjoys the favour of a still greater lord, of whose power and splendour he is the representative and mediator in the community.

The assistance which the ability to rally popular sentiment in such fashion afforded in the short term to churchmen struggling to preserve their property and their values in the face of naked and unabashed power, and the threat which it carried in the long run to the institutions which they established in doing so, sprang from the same source. A miracle *in vita* was established as such not by spiritual or ecclesiastical authority or process, but by the onlookers who decided that the event which they had witnessed was a miracle, not a coincidence, and that it had been performed by virtue of holy, not diabolic power. The miracle worker, in short, exercised social and political power by popular acclaim.

The geography of miracle working is almost as revealing as the chronology. The force of popular indignation under religious leadership was most dramatically harnessed in the cause of ecclesiastical reform in northern and central Italy and southwestern France from the second half of the tenth century onwards, spreading to northwestern France by the end of the eleventh century, and still liable to erupt wherever local conflict became intense for much of the twelfth. Charismatic leadership and the power associated with it are much less evident, on the other hand, in the French royal demesne, the English and Sicilian kingdoms (except for the special case of the influence of Anglo-Saxon hermits in Norman England) and the German Reich⁶⁰ – in short, wherever the ecclesiastical hierarchy could expect to call upon the support of well established secular authority. In other words, the capacity to enlist popular support through conspicuous personal holiness, most dramatically acclaimed in acknowledgement as a miracle worker, reflects a leakage of power from established institutions. It was one of the manifestations of what Georges Duby called an age of disorder between the two ages of order which were the Carolingian era and the high middle

ages. It underlines the revolutionary nature of the changes with which we are concerned, for it shows that Gregory VII was far from being alone in his willingness to invoke popular enthusiasm to subvert the existing hierarchy and the existing distribution of wealth and power, though he was almost alone in doing it so explicitly. And it immediately raises the question why such popular enthusiasm should have been so readily available in these two and a half centuries to those who had the ability to inspire it.