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PREVIEW

Secular Activities of the Episcopate in Gaul to 639

by

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A THESIS

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Introduction

For the bishops of the Christian church to engage in other than religious activities has been a constant feature of its history. Whenever in fact the church has been established in the state, the participation of its clergy in secular life has been more or less extensive. This tradition was obviously founded during the classical and medieval periods, when the functions of religion and government in society were thought of as but two parts of a whole administrative activity. The relative importance of each in this relationship became often a matter of serious dispute, but the shared responsibility of each to society was in the main taken for granted.

The secular functions of the bishops were fixed in Roman law in the years following the edict of toleration. This study begins therefore with the years when ostensibly Christian emperors used the bishops as part of the secular administrative machinery. Gaul has been chosen as the area within which to determine the scope and importance of the secular activities of the episcopate in the period following legalization because of the comparative abundance of the sources still extant for that region, because of the importance of the country in the later revival of the Roman empire in the west, and because of its place in later medieval history. The year 639 was chosen as the

concluding date for the investigation because the death of king Dagobert I in that year marked the end of the line of strong Merovingian kings. The years following until the time of Charles Martel are of little significance, a period during which noble and priest engaged in petty local political maneuvers, while weak kings shuffled their way to unregretted and often untimely ends. To have continued the present investigation to the time of Charles Martel would have added little of importance. To have carried it further would have necessitated including the re-establishment of imperial government in the west, and would have prolonged the discussion to an unreasonable length.

At the moment when Constantine legalized Christianity, the bishops of the church had been for years the center of its ritual, its polity and its discipline. Cyprian's dictum, no bishop, no church, stated categorically enough the supreme place which the episcopal office had acquired by the third century. The bishops, the prelati of the church in a very real sense, had accordingly borne the brunt of the persecutions. When the church was granted a legal status in society, it was they who accepted or assumed the secular responsibilities inherent in the new relationship. As Roman provincial government broke down during the fifth century, and the barbarians at the same time made permanent settlements within the empire, the bishops

of the church were often not merely the only exponents of Roman culture, but also of Roman rule, and they led the people in bargaining with, and sometimes in defying, the intruding Germans.¹

They were for the most part aristocrats, and were appointed with the consent of clergy and people by royal diploma. They took care of paupers and the sick, eased the lot of slaves and criminals, and ransomed captives in war. They coined money, built bridges and aqueducts, and confined rivers within their banks. They managed vast estates, with extensive milling, brewing and wine-making rights. They sometimes collected tolls and excises, while struggling themselves to avoid the payment of tolls and taxes.

They took the place of fugitive or captive Roman or German officials. They were judges, and counsellors at kings' courts. They served as envoys. They stocked and fortified against siege the cities where they were seated, and on rare occasions even led out troops of armed men. Their varied responsibilities compelled them to mix in politics, while at the same time they administered the tangled affairs of a religious movement which was just outgrowing its adolescent years, to settle down into a long historic career.²

¹ See chapter one.

² See chapter two.

In the fourth century the church had succeeded by only a narrow margin in bringing about the suppression of Roman Arianism. In the fifth century the influx of the barbarians brought the church in southern Gaul under German Arians, while in the north it had to contend with a well-entrenched paganism. A strong interest in theology and the influence of a vigorous monasticism made the bishops in the south eager to maintain Catholic orthodoxy. They were therefore stubborn in their resistance to the Arian heresy and were determined to bring about by all possible means the conversion or the destruction of the Arian kingdoms.

It is anomalous that just here, where Catholic bishops and Gallo-Roman nobles had an excellent opportunity to work together, co-operation was not achieved. The two classes had much in common. The Gallo-Roman nobles professed Catholicism. Like the aristocracy, the church was an institution with great wealth in land. The church and the nobility provided the only means for the maintenance of Roman culture. But while the bishops were furnishing a more or less effective leadership to the perplexed populace in Gaul, the majority of the nobles stood aside.

This aloofness dates from early in the fifth century. There is evidence of a marked inclination on the part of the Gallo-Romans to be restive under the rule of Rome. They were exasperated at the inability of the imperial govern-

ment to suppress insurrections and to stay the invasion of the Germans, and were disgusted with the ineptitude of imperial officials in the diocese. For two centuries centralized bureaucracies had deprived the nobles of a place in municipal affairs, and it had become a habit with many of them to seclude themselves from public life, and to enjoy the income and the comforts of their huge estates. Of those who did enter public life, not a few allied themselves deliberately with the Arian Germans, under whom they served as generals, governors of provinces and court officials. It was left to the bishops then to resist, at first passively, the barbarian heretics, and when the Franks appeared, to give surreptitious support to them. It is easy to understand therefore with what satisfaction the Catholic bishops in the south watched the success of Clovis, especially after he became an avowed Catholic, and found ways to assist him.

In the north, where Roman culture and the Christian religion were less well established, and where the inability of Rome to enforce public peace was rather taken for granted, the bishops and the Catholic aristocracy were drawn together. When the Franks overthrew the Roman state of Syagrius, both church and nobility accepted the situation with as good grace as possible. Indeed, there seems to have been an expectation that the pagan Franks would become Catholics. When this became an accomplished fact,

the Gallo-Romans, both ecclesiastical and secular, co-operated readily with the Franks. As these extended their rule over the whole of Gaul, the church in the south welcomed them, and the aristocracy there was gradually won over. It was not long before the majority of the nobles throughout Gaul were taking an active part in public affairs under the Franks. The Franks themselves officered their armies, but the Gallo-Romans occupied nearly all the provincial and municipal offices, and held responsible places at Merovingian royal courts. The Merovingians established a secular state. They ruled the church as one of the institutions of the state. They granted to the bishops no official political status. But in the course of the succeeding century the bishops were obliged to assume an ever larger place in political life.¹

This was partly due to the wide civic powers which the bishops had. It was occasioned too by the political confusion characteristic of the Merovingian state. The bishops attempted for the most part to remain aloof from the turmoil of politics. A few indeed deliberately participated, some were drawn in by their own lack of foresight, but the majority, when they became involved, sought to exert the influence of their ecclesiastical office as a counter-balance to the appalling conditions which Frankish incapac-

¹ See chapter four.

ity to rule encouraged. Recognition of mutuality of interest between bishops and nobles was hampered by petty misunderstandings and local jealousies. The fact of royal appointment inclined the bishops to be loyal to the kings. Gradually however bishops and nobles were drawn together. They identified common objectives. Their co-operation became marked with the appearance of boy kings on the Merovingian thrones. The aristocracy obtained a hold on government, first in Austrasia, and later in both Neustria and Burgundy, and as the bishops saw in their efforts opportunity to advance their own and the church's interests, and possibly to bring a measure of peace to distressed Gaul, they joined with the nobles against the kings. The emergence of a virtual oligarchy of nobles and bishops was delayed only by the efficient reign of king Dagobert I.¹

For the recognition of the church by the state, and for the endowment of the church with extra-religious functions, Roman law as codified in the Codex Theodosianus,² and in the Lex Romana or Breviary of Alaric II,³ provide the materials of study. The various Germanic codes of law, and

¹ See chapter five.

² Codex Theodosianus cum Codicibus Gregoriani et Hermogeniani, ed. Gustav Friedrich Haenel, 2 vols. in 1 (Bonn, 1842). Theodosiani Libri XVI, seu Codex Theodosianus, cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis, ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul M. Meyer, 2 vols. in 3 (Berlin, 1905).

³ Lex Romana Visigothorum, seu Breviarium Alarici, ed. Gustav Friedrich Haenel (Leipzig, 1849).

the legal documents such as capitularies, diplomas and formularies, are available in critical editions in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica.¹

The works of Orosius² and Salvian³ give valuable glimpses of conditions in western Europe at the time the Germans were establishing themselves within the empire. For historical events, and for the actual participation of the bishops in them, the chronicles⁴ furnish a skeleton framework. For anyone who studies Gaul of the sixth century the dependence upon bishop Gregory of Tours' History of the Franks⁵ is complete. Because Gregory was a bishop he paid much attention to the work of the episcopate. In recording both the religious and political history of his time, he included, however, so much that is of little historical value that the reader is smothered beneath a mass of tiresome details, and he finds it difficult to make from the record an historical synthesis. But it is the

¹ Monumenta Germaniae Historica, ed. G. H. Pertz and G. Waitz, 98 vols. (Berlin, 1826 ff.), Leges, old and new series.

² Paulus Orosius, Historiarum adversus Paganos Libri VII, in the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 63 vols. (Vienna, 1866 ff.), vol. V.

³ De Gubernatione Dei Libros VIII, ibid. vol. VIII, and in the Monumenta Auctores Antiquissimi, (15 vols.), vol. I, pt. I. Both Orosius and Salvian are translated in the Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies, ed. for the Dept. of History of Columbia University, New York City, N.Y., by Austin P. Evans (in progress).

⁴ Chronica Minora I, in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. IX, and Chronica Minora II, ibid., vol. XI.

⁵ Gregorius Sanctus, Episcopus Turonensis, Historia Francorum, in the Monumenta, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, vol. I.

only record we have of the period. The translation of Dalton,¹ and that of Bréhaut in the Records of Civilization series,² are reliable, although the latter is only a translation of extensive selections. The chronicle of the so-called Fredegarius³ is indispensable for the period after Gregory. It is, however, inferior to him in historical quality, and is of unknown authorship.

Collections of letters for the period under study are fortunately available. Of these the correspondence of Sidonius Apollinaris, the bishop of Clermont, is of great importance for the third quarter of the fifth century.⁴ It is supplemented by the letters of bishops Faustus of Riez and Ruricius of Limoges,⁵ and the correspondence of bishop Avitus of Vienne for a later period.⁶ The letters of bishop Desiderius of Cahors are useful for the seventh century.⁷ The poems of Sidonius Apollinaris, and of Venantius Fortun-

¹ Gregory of Tours, History of the Franks, tr. Ormonde Maddock Dalton, 2 vols.; vol. I, Introduction; vol. II, Text (Oxford, 1927).

² Ibid., tr. Ernest Bréhaut, in the Records of Civilization series, (New York, 1916).

³ Fredegarius (sic), Chronicon, in the Monumenta, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, vol. II.

⁴ Opera, in the Monumenta, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. VIII. The Letters are trans. by Ormonde Maddock Dalton, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1915), and the Poems by W. B. Anderson, in the Loeb Classical Library, (London, and Cambridge, Mass., 1915 ff.), only one vol. published.

⁵ In the Monumenta, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. VIII.

⁶ In ibid., vol. VI, pt. II.

⁷ In the Monumenta, Epistolae, vol. III, Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi, vol. I.

atus,¹ the bishop of Poitiers and contemporary of Gregory of Tours, illustrate their times, and furnish a few items of historical interest.

In studying this period it is necessary of course to use the pertinent Vitae Sanctorum.² But as historical material for this study they are of little value. Obviously they were not written for historical purposes at all. Their authors, mostly unknown, were not content to relate their heroes in any ordinary manner to the events of this world. Their Vitae were intended to show how their saintly heroes were connected with and aided by forces of another, supernatural world. The saints' lives are therefore the Christian parallel of classical mythologies. The bishops in them exert their influence through the awesome fear of the supernatural forces which were thought to empower them. When, for example, Vivianus, the bishop of Saintes, interceded with king Theodorus (sic) of the Visigoths for some of his people who were held in bonds in Toulouse, it was, according to the eighth century author of his Vita, because he inspired in the king's mind a dread of the wrath

¹ In the Monumenta, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. IV, pt. I.

² In the Monumenta, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum, Passiones Vitaeque Sanctorum Aevi Merovingici, vols. III to VII, and the Acta Sanctorum Bollandistorum, 61 vols., (Brussels and Paris, 1643-1894).

of God that the plight of the men of Saintes was relieved.¹ The biographer of the eleventh century who wrote a life of bishop Anianus of Orleans was concerned much more with the efficacy of the bishop's prayers in the rescue of the city from the Huns than with the details of the maneuvers of Attila.² Hincmar's life of bishop Remigius of Reims³ is but a tiresome sequence of miracles, and not an account of the long and useful career of an important bishop. To be sure, many historical events of the period can be understood not as a result of supernatural intervention, but only as a result of men's belief in it, and therefore the Vitae are important in understanding the medieval point of view. What occasional facts are gleaned from them must be verified by other sources. Yet often these authors, if close contemporaries of their heroes, include material of historical value.

¹ See below, pp. 159, 160.

² See below, pp. 157-159.

³ See below, pp. 220, 221.

Chapter One

The Establishment of the Episcopate in Roman Society to 438

The bishops of the Christian church came very soon to stand at the center of the ecclesiastical organization. The way in which their office evolved is somewhat obscure, but as early as the year 250 A. D., Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, could say of the episcopal office,

Through the changes of times and successions, the ordering of the bishops and the plan of the church flow onwards; so that the church is founded on the bishops, and every act of the church is controlled by these same rulers.¹

After this date the power of the bishop steadily grew until by the fourth century he stood as the representative of the church before the world, and the embodiment of all that the church claimed and strove to be.

His seat was in the principal, often the only, church

¹ Epistle xxvi, para. 1, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Am. ed., 10 vols., (New York, 1895 ff.; hereinafter referred to as ANF), vol. V, p. 305.

in the city, and his diocese¹ was the civitas which depended politically and economically upon the city.² Around him functioned the clergy. The arch-deacon was his co-adjutor in the administration of diocesan affairs. Presbyters, or priests, gave to the people religious instruction, and when delegated by the bishop administered sacraments. The deacons, of whom there were normally seven in each church, assisted at the altar and under the eye of the bishop dispensed funds of the church to the widows, orphans and poor of the congregation. Lesser clergy, sub-deacons, lectors, exorcists, and janitors were members of the episcopal group. With their wives and children these made of

¹ As late as the sixth century the terms diocesis and parochia were used interchangeably. See examples in Gregory of Tours, Historia Francorum, (hereinafter referred to as H. F.), bk. iv, chap. 13 and v, 5, in Monumenta Germaniae Historica (referred to as MGH), ed. G. H. Pertz and G. Waitz, 98 vols., (Berlin 1826 and after), series Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum (referred to as SRM), vol. I, pp. 150, 197. Cf. translation of H. F., by Ormonde Maddock Dalton, 2 vols.: vol. I, Introduction; vol. II, Text, (Oxford, 1927), vol. I, pp. 126. Diocesan is used for parishes in the proceedings of the council of Agde, canon 22: Isidor, Hispalensis Episcopus, Concilia, in Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Latin series, (hereinafter referred to as PL), edited by Jacques Paul Migne, 225 vols. (Paris, 1844 ff.), vol. LXXXIV, col. 266.

² Cf. Dalton, Gregory, H. F., vol. I, Intro., p. 160.

the bishop's entourage a large family.¹ They were under the direct control of the bishop.

The bishops who sat in the great provincial capitals profited by the importance of their cities, and as metropolitans, or archbishops, came later to hold a superior place in the order of bishops. In a few cases, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem, the metropolitans bore the title of patriarch. In the west only Rome was of patriarchal rank. After the legalization of Christianity the whole diocesan organization developed rapidly.²

Because of the authority vested in the episcopal office, the church sought to install in it men of character

¹ Eusebius reproduces a letter of Cornelius, the bishop of Rome, (251-252), to Fabius, in which, while rebuking Novatian the schismatic, he enumerates the personnel of his church: "This avenger of the Gospel then did not know that there should be one bishop in a Catholic church; yet he was not ignorant (for how could he be?) that in it there were forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolyths, fifty-two exorcists, readers, and janitors, and over fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress, all of whom the grace and kindness of the Master nourish:" Ecclesiastical History, (hereinafter referred to as Eusebius, E. H.) bk. vi, chap. xliii, paras. 11 and 12, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 14 vols., (New York, 1890-1896, second series; hereinafter referred to as NPNF, 2S), vol. I, p. 288. Cf. Charles M. L. Bayet, Christian Pfister and A. Kleinclausz, Le Christianisme, les Barbares, Mérovingiens et Carolingiens, vol. II, Pt. I of Histoire de France depuis les Origines jusqu'à la Révolution, Ernest Lavisse, ed., 9 vols. in 18, (Paris, 1900-1911), p. 30.

² The fourth century councils make little reference to metropolitans. In the west the office did not develop until after 400. Cf. C. H. Turner, "Organization of the Church," chap. 4, in Cambridge Medieval History, (CMH) 8 vols., (Cambridge, England, 1911 ff.), vol. I, p. 168.

and intelligence.¹ In this, to a remarkable degree, it succeeded. Sometimes careful men accepted with reluctance the responsibilities resting in the episcopacy. Sometimes men of ambition endeavored to hide with a feigned humility their eagerness to occupy the episcopal chair.² As the number of bishoprics increased, the church set down in conciliar canons the qualifications to be looked for in candidates for this high office.

A bishop must be at least thirty years old.³ He could not be a novice, and must have gone through the lower clerical grades of deacon and priest.⁴ By the fourth century it was expected of him that he should have been

¹ In the so-called Constitutions of the Holy Apostles we find in bk. ii, sect. i, ii and iii, and in bk. vii, sect. ii, specific characteristics and qualifications looked for in the ideal bishop. Translations are in ANF., vol. VII, bk. ii, pp. 396 ff., and bk. vii, sect. ii, pp. 405, 406. The material in these books was probably gathered as late as the fourth century, but it is conceded by careful critics that they present standards and situations of the third century; see translator's introduction to the Constitutions, ANF., vol. VII, p. 388.

² The "nolo episcopari" of the episcopal candidates is an ever recurring expression.

³ Since a priest could not be less than thirty: Council of Neocaesarea, cir. 315, canon 11; Charles Joseph Hefele, History of the Church Councils, translated by William R. Clark and Henry Nutscombe Oxenham, 5 vols., (Edinburgh, 1872-1896), vol. I, p. 228. The age limits for priests and deacons varied somewhat in later practice.

⁴ Ambrose was but one example of a number who met this requirement per saltem.