

43. A MONASTIC REFORMATION.

THE CLUNIAC MONASTIC ORDER

This world is full of trouble, struggles and affliction. Every person experiences strife on this earth. The important thing will be whether we have fought the good fight. Often bitter and bloody battles are fought between different nations. These are the terrible consequences of sin.

On top of that, the war God declared between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed still rages. That war occurs in the 'field' of God's Church. The Church stands in the centre of that struggle.

Other wars have times of peace or cease-fire. Then the weapons are at rest. However, the struggle in God's Church knows *no* time of truce or peace! True, the battle is sometimes more visible than at others, but the struggle in God's church *never* stops! However, one day that war *will* cease. It will end when Christ appears on the clouds of heaven. The end will not come through a peace treaty concluded between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan because no peace *can* exist between those two kingdoms. The battle will end because the realm of the prince of darkness will pass away, and Christ will be victorious.

We already told you a lot about the heavy, bitter battle which the Church of the Lord had to wage throughout history. At times it seemed as if the Church would suffer defeat and Satan would triumph. But no matter how dark it sometimes looked, it was not the devil but the Church who emerged victorious from that struggle.

In the previous chapters, we have discussed one of the darkest times. The years of invasions by the Vikings drew a bloody trail through entire Western Europe. But did Satan conquer? No, he lost humiliatingly, just as he always does! Even the pagan nations in the North of Europe, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, became acquainted with

Christianity. They learned to bend their knees before Jesus of Nazareth.

Did these defeats make the devil become despondent and give up in disgust? No way! The devil never gives up! He continues doggedly and grimly till the bitter end.

Now that his wicked plan to destroy God's Church by attacks from outside ended in a complete failure, he tries something different. Who knows, perhaps a different strategy will succeed.

We know that the Roman Catholic Church had departed very far from the truth of the Word of God. Abominable, unscriptural errors had the upper hand, and the people believed them! And yet, we may never forget that God's people were still in that straying Church. There have always been children of God, and they will always remain. Even though we no longer know their names, God does. God has not lost sight of a single one. Because God's people still lived in the Roman Catholic Church, the Lord still upheld that church, despite the depth of its error and superstition.

The material in this chapter is not simple. Yet, we cannot omit it because it clearly shows the golden thread of God's reign. That's why this history is so important. It teaches us that the eternal King of



Vikings attack Paris. <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/>

the Church governs, protects, and maintains His people. We may never lose sight of God's providence.

THE DEVIL TRIES A DIFFERENT STRATEGY

The Roman Catholic Church was in a bad way. The popes ruled in Rome. They imagined themselves to be the representatives of Christ on earth. They taught that they had been appointed to that position by Christ Himself. Were they not the successors of Peter? Everyone had to obey the commands of the pope of Rome. He ruled over the entire Roman Catholic Church.

This was a great error. The Lord Jesus never appointed anyone to represent Him. He rules, protects and governs His Church Himself!

Their appeal to what God said to Peter is not true either. The Lord Jesus did not say: "I will build My Church upon Peter," but: "On this *rock*, I will build My Church."

That referred to the *confession* of Peter that *Jesus is the son of God!*

Regrettably, the people believed the Roman lie.

In the days of the migration of nations, the popes were men who commanded respect by their walk of life. They lived blamelessly and were an example to others. But at the time of this chapter, the popes were evil and immoral. They lived very sinful lives, committing the most horrific deeds. Murder and manslaughter reigned supreme. They were not ashamed of any of it either and didn't shrink from any type of wickedness. One pope after another was murdered. The new pope was often worse than the one before him. I can't tell you all about it, but it was terrible. This wicked papal behaviour had destructive consequences for the whole Church. Many bishops and priests, abbots and monks followed the popes' bad example. The Roman clergy began to live in the worst sins. They thought: 'If the pope can do it, we can too!' What, take care of their congregations and earnestly warn the people? Point them to the destructive consequences of sin and how that dishonours God? No way! They did not care about the members of their

congregation! They had great hunting parties and had one feast after another.

Those feasts often degenerated into drunken revelry. Drunkenness occurred regularly.

The lower clergy shamelessly committed the most scandalous sins.

They neglected the preaching.

In the many monasteries, the monks lived sinful, worldly lifestyles.

You know how the monasteries originated. People no longer wished to live in a sinful world and went to live in a monastery so that sin would no longer tempt them. However admirable that purpose seemed to be, it was wrong because the Lord Jesus did not pray that His heavenly Father would take His people out of the world, but He *did* pray if He would keep them from the evil one! God will keep us from sin and unrighteousness, but we must let the light of God's grace shine in this corrupt world. The basis was not sound.

True, there had been a time when the monasteries were a blessing for the nation. Then the monks did not spend their time in idleness. Some taught at the convent school. Others worked hard to build up fruitful gardens, while others visited the sick and needy.



'Others work hard to build up fruitful gardens...'

<https://app.emaze.com/>

But now, monasteries were setting a corrupt example to the nation. The Viking invasions were just over. The monasteries that had escaped being plundered by those cruel robbers were super-wealthy. Those that the Vikings had looted and destroyed experienced great poverty and misery.

The monks had managed to restore their buildings, but they lived in the greatest poverty. You would think those rich monasteries would see it as their task to assist their poor brother monks.



Two monks. painting by John Rocheleau

But they didn't. They had forgotten what it meant to show brotherly love. The monks from the rich monasteries lived in excess and luxury.

They regularly had drinking parties which often became orgies.

Drunken monks roamed the streets, behaving offensively towards ordinary people. The monks from the poor and looted monasteries could not give a dinner party because they could not afford to. Great dissatisfaction grew in those poor monasteries. When they saw the excess and wastefulness of their brothers, they became bitter.

In every aspect, a significant decline was visible in all monasteries. Indeed, sad and sinful conditions predominated throughout the entire Roman Catholic Church. It seemed as if the devil was successful in ruining the Church from the inside. And there were still people of God who lived in that corrupt Church! Although they warned, the clergy did not heed their warnings. The devil had not succeeded in destroying the Church through the Vikings, yet the Church would destroy itself if this kept going. All respect and reverence for the priests and bishops disappeared. The ordinary people mocked the clergy, who only had themselves to blame. They were not worthy of any respect. It could no longer go on that way.

THE CLUNYAC MONASTIC ORDER

In 910, the Roman Catholic church founded a new monastery in Burgundy, a province in France. They built that monastery in the town of Cluny. The duke who lived there paid for it all. This duke possessed extensive estates, beautiful forests, fruitful fields, vineyards, etc.

When he established this monastery, he gave it all those valuable estates! So that new monastery had immediate wealth!

The Cluny monastery was placed under the direct supervision of the pope. That was a sensible move because now the greedy bishops in the neighbourhood could not touch it!

Law and order ruled that monastery. The monks there lived good and blameless lives. They were an example to the entire area. It did not take long before people spoke of that monastery with respect and reverence throughout France and beyond. The difference between Cluny and the other monasteries was so noticeable. However, that was not all.

Soon, many monasteries began to follow the example of the monastery at Cluny.

We know that an abbot or prior supervised every monastic community. He had to make sure that the monks did everything in a proper, orderly, and quiet manner. But most of the abbots did not care about that one bit!

They did not give firm leadership or enforce the prescribed rules and duties. Everyone suited themselves.

However, in the Cluny monastery, the abbot cared for his monks like a father. They lacked nothing, but he demanded punctual obedience. He took care of the Cluny monastery and regularly visited the other monasteries that followed Cluny's good example. He made extensive inspection tours to ensure that the monks who lived in those monasteries behaved orderly and followed the rules. He severely punished disobedient monks. That was necessary because otherwise, they would soon relapse into the same sinful ways prevalent in the other monasteries.

The Cluniac monks obtained a powerful influence over the people.

The people respected them.

They listened to what these monks said because they lived accordingly. They set a good example.

Over the years, more and more monasteries joined the Cluniac monastic order. Eventually, at least two thousand monasteries were associated with this order, spread over various countries throughout Europe.

The law and order in this new monastic order was a good thing. The attempt to change the sinful life of the monks in the monasteries was praiseworthy. They needed to stop the sin and immorality, which was everywhere. But sadly, that's where the reforming efforts ended. They did not oppose the abominable errors of the Roman Catholic Church, and that was a pity. The Cluniac reforming monks remained thoroughly Roman Catholic. True, they changed the lifestyle of the monks, but not their doctrine! They maintained and upheld all the heresies we have already discussed. The reformation was only outward. The Roman Catholic Church continued to be what it was. Worse, the Cluniac reforming



Monk Tasting Wine. Painting by Antonio Casanova y Estorach 1886

monks added several errors, and that way, they contributed to the Roman Catholic Church wandering even further away from the pure doctrine of the Bible.

THE EMPEROR USES THE CLUNIAC ORDER

In those days, the emperor was the ruler in Germany.

But that emperor was not the only ruler. The German Empire consisted of various smaller duchies ruled by powerful dukes.

The emperor stood at the head of those dukes.

But those dukes often opposed the emperor. They wanted to be autonomous and not subject themselves to the emperor. They repeatedly refused to obey the emperor's commands. Many times those dukes were at enmity with their emperor, which sometimes degenerated into open warfare. And so, the task of the German emperor was not an easy one. At times he maintained himself with much difficulty. Do you know what he did because of that?

When the Cluniac monastic order spread so widely and obtained much influence, he supported them. If a bishop died somewhere in Germany and a successor had to be appointed, the emperor would appoint a bishop from the Cluniac monastic order.

If a new abbot had to come to a monastery, the emperor appointed a new abbot from that order. They were generally good abbots and active bishops who worked hard to stop the wicked conduct of the lower clergy and monks. In that way, the German emperor obtained significant influence in the Church. Those bishops and abbots that the emperor had appointed were good friends of his. They supported him and often gave him good advice on how to act. The German emperor also gave those abbots and bishops large plots of land to rule. So those bishops became secular rulers. By these methods, the emperor also extended his power and influence in the Church. That was a clever move because now, the bishops supported the emperor whenever he got into trouble with the German dukes, for they had also become powerful rulers.

Now the bishops also had a voice in the government of the German empire. It is clear that the emperor purposely gave large tracts of land to various bishops, for then he no longer stood alone in his struggle with the dukes. Because of that, the power of the dukes diminished. They could no longer coerce the emperor as easily as before.

A significant improvement had come about in the monastic life through the Cluniac reforming monks, but in Rome, the conditions were still terrible. One pope after another was either murdered or deposed. At one stage, three popes ruled at the same time who cursed each other in the name of Jesus Christ. That was terrible! There was so much hatred and envy in the highest circles of Rome.

At their wits' end, the people of Rome called on the German emperor for help because it could not continue like this. The chaos just kept getting worse and had to stop! The emperor of Germany was instantly ready to help. He immediately marched to Rome with a powerful army. He deposed the three popes who were ruling at the same time and appointed another pope. The people of Rome were very thankful to the emperor. By his powerful intervention, he had put

an end to the unbearable situation. That's why the people of Rome said:

"You may choose a new pope when that becomes necessary again."

That's how the emperor obtained the right to appoint new popes. This rule considerably increased the emperor's influence in the Church. It had slowly reached the point that the emperor had complete control in the Church, which was mostly the popes' fault. Yet, this situation was not good either. Secular rulers may not rule the Church, and the church may not rule in government and state affairs.

Church and state must help and support each other, but each must stick to their own domain. When the state rules in the Church, we get a *state church* and when the Church rules in the state, we get a *church state*! Both are wrong. Church and state must not stand above each other, but they must stand next to each other. Allow me to use a simple example.

When we put two bicycles on top of each other, both fall to the ground, but when we place these two bicycles a little way from each other and make them lean against each other, then they remain standing, and they stand firmly, too!



Cluny Abbey was founded in 910 and was built on a forested hunting preserve donated by William I the Pious, duke of Aquitaine and count of Auvergne. It was founded by Benedictine monks who offered perpetual prayer, emphasising liturgy and spiritual pursuits over labour and other monastic activities. 7 wonders.org



That's how it is with Church and state. The Church must take care of itself, and the state must take care of itself. The government must protect the Church, and the Church must

instruct the government how it must govern. If they help and support each other, they both remain standing.

But if one wants to stand above the other, both fall. It causes jealousy and strife.

When they work against each other, it always causes destruction.

That's not right.

The Church must respect the state and urge its members to obey those placed over them, and the state must esteem the Church and subject itself to the authority of God's Word and have itself led by that Word.

I could mention various instances from the Bible. One example is sufficient.

When the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus:

"Is it lawful to pay tribute unto Caesar?" the Lord answered:

"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." That is very clear! That's why I have discussed this first; otherwise, we cannot understand the following chapters. In those chapters, we will discuss the conflict between Church and state, the battle for power!



Model of Cluny III. Built in 1088-.. Wikipedia

QUESTIONS

1. We saw how the Church emerged victoriously from the struggle. God defeated Satan in his attempt to keep Christianity out of the lands belonging to the Vikings. What attempt did Satan now make in his desire to harm or destroy the Church?
2. Why did the Lord allow the Church to stand despite its abominable errors?
3. What was the condition of the clergy during this time? Was the pope any exception? Explain.
4. While the clergy immersed itself in iniquity, it neglected its calling. What was its calling?
5. What was the attitude of those living in rich monasteries? Poor monasteries?
6. What was unique about the Cluny monastery?
7. Describe life in the Cluny monastery.
8. Describe the duties of the abbot.
9. Why does the author say that this reform was an outward but not an inward reformation?
10. How did the Cluniac reforming movement spread?
11. What motive lay behind the German emperor's desire to obtain abbots from the Cluny monastery?
12. What does the author mean when he says that the bishops became secular rulers?
13. How did the emperor obtain the right to select the pope?
14. What is a state church? a church-state?
15. What is a proper church-state relationship?
16. What did the Lord Jesus say concerning the church-state relationship?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:5. Relate this verse to the Cluny reforming movement.

2. Read 1 Timothy 3. What are the requirements for a good bishop? How did the monks of this time fail to abide by these standards?

3. The Lord had His children, even amid the iniquity of the time. Find one instance in God's Word where conditions were similar when one of God's children felt that he alone was left in the land. What answer did the Lord give him?

4. Analyse the church-state relationship in your own country. Does it follow the guidelines suggested by the author in this chapter? Explain your answer.