

44. HILDEBRAND OR GREGORY VII

In the previous chapter we learned that the state almost entirely dominated the church. The German emperors ruled over the church. They made decisions about matters that were purely church-related and none of their business. The German emperors appointed the bishops and abbots of the monasteries. They deposed popes and selected new ones. This situation was not right, but it was the church's own fault. The popes and the higher clergy had only themselves to thank for it. A few times, the people of Rome called on the German emperors for help against the wicked popes. Then the emperor would intervene to put an end to those unbearable conditions. But that would change.

HILDEBRAND'S EARLY YEARS

In the year 1021, a boy was born in an Italian province who received the name of Hildebrand. His parents were very ordinary people. What place would that child later occupy in society? What career would that child have? No one could answer that. We cannot look into the future. God directs and governs every nation on earth, but the omnipotent God also determines each individual's life. However, each person remains responsible for their actions.

If someone had said:

"This baby will become one of the most powerful men of his time", no one would have believed it. Shaking their head, they would have answered: "No way, that's impossible. That child will have to provide for his livelihood with hard work, just like his dad."

And yet, the career of Hildebrand took a completely different course than everyone thought it would.

While still relatively young, he entered a monastery, and through that, he joined the clerical class. The monastery in which he became a monk was one of the Cluniac monasteries.

This youthful monk ended up having a powerful influence on all of church life. Hildebrand was a man with a strict code of conduct. He never went



Gregory VII, 1015-1085, www.fineart America.com

to any excess, and he loathed the wicked actions of the higher and lower clerics. Soon his name was well-known far and wide. He shifted to Rome and became an adviser to the popes.

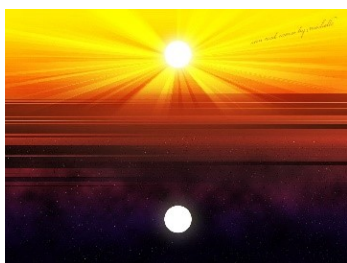
Hildebrand saw very clearly that things would go wrong if the German emperors continued to have a say in church life. That's why his aim in life became the liberation of the church from the state. He fought and argued in favour of this for his entire life. He employed every means at his disposal and did not shrink from anything to reach that goal. The secular rulers must not appoint the popes, but it must be the other way around! The rulers had to be appointed by the popes! The state must not be the most powerful and rule over the church, but the church had to rule over the state! The pope must become the highest power on earth in church and state.

It was a good thing that Hildebrand wanted to separate the church from the world. He was perfectly correct in that. But he was *not* right in wanting to make the church dominate over the state. That was going too far. Church and state

must stand *next* to each other and not rule *over* each other. Each has its own task on earth, and with that, I do not mean that they have nothing to do with each other because they must support each other. We explained this in the previous chapter.

But Hildebrand 'forgot' that. Forget? I think not. He pushed this theory because he genuinely believed the pope should rule supreme as Christ's representative on earth. His pride did not tolerate any power above himself when he was pope. He always used the example of the sun and the moon. In nature, the moon receives its light from the sun. The moon itself has no light.

Hildebrand said:
"The papacy is the sun, and the secular rulers, the emperors and kings, are the moon. The emperors and kings must receive their power from the papacy."



According to him, the pope should appoint the emperors and kings and crown them. If those earthly rulers would not subject themselves to the ecclesiastical powers, the pope also had to have the authority to dethrone them. Everything in both church and state must obey the pope unconditionally. In a word: The pope must be the absolute monarch on earth.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. It wasn't that far yet. It would cost an awful lot of turmoil and strife to get to that stage.

You can imagine that the German emperors and other European rulers would not allow the pope to supplant them just like that.

In this chapter, I want to tell you something about this tug of war type struggle.

HILDEBRAND PUSHES HIS IDEAS

"Must the popes, the representatives of Christ on earth, be appointed and deposed by German emperors? No way! That is out of the question!

That must change! When a new pope must be chosen, the church herself will provide one. The emperor has nothing to do with it. The church must regulate that herself." That's how Hildebrand thought and spoke. Up to that point, he was absolutely correct.

One of the first measures he took to change the way things were was to stipulate that only the *cardinals* could choose a new pope from now on.

Cardinals? What are they?

Simply put, they are the highest level of clergymen under the pope, appointed to that level from and by the next level down, the archbishops and bishops. Not all high clergymen became cardinals. Only a small, fixed number. Originally the cardinals were all Italians; later, the church also appointed foreign cardinals.

So now, only cardinals would be able to choose a pope. The German emperor, as well as every other secular ruler, had no say in the matter.

At that time, Hildebrand was not yet pope, but he was the man who forced that decision.

This move shoved the German emperor back substantially.

That system of cardinals still exists in the Roman Catholic Church. If today, through death, they must choose a new pope, the cardinals choose a new pope from *among the cardinals*. So every cardinal *may* become pope, but every cardinal *will* not become pope because there are many cardinals, and only one from among them can become pope.



Cardinals about to choose a pope.
<https://www.theguardian.com/>

It follows that whoever is not a cardinal can never become a pope. Therefore, the appointment of a Roman Catholic clergyman to cardinal is a great honour for him.

HILDEBRAND AS POPE GREGORY VII

In the year 1073, Hildebrand became pope. As a result, he was no longer called Hildebrand but GREGORY VII. So, we shall also call him Gregory. Just remember that "Hildebrand" and "Gregory" are two names for the same person.

When he became pope, Gregory VII made one regulation after another because Gregory knew what he wanted.

The second measure to free the church from the world was the introduction of *celibacy* for all the clergy.

Again, a tricky word. What does it mean? 'Celibacy' means that you may not marry. This rule already applied to the higher clergy, but now Gregory made it a rule for all the clergy. However, many priests were already married, and most of them had a family with children.

Perhaps you ask:

"How can they solve that?"

Gregory had his response ready. His command was:

"Whoever is already married must send his wife away, and those who have children must send their children away."

What a terrible command!

It is not surprising that the opposition to that regulation was enormous from all levels of the clergy. They refused to subject themselves to that command! But Gregory did not budge an inch and pushed his decree through with an iron will. He simply deposed those who would not obey. He cast out the disobedient!

Some clerics preferred to leave the clergy rather than leave their wives and children. But thousands finally gave in to this command of the pope. And what was the result?

By that appalling command, Gregory plunged thousands of women and children into misery.

Women suddenly lost their husbands and provider.

Children lost their affectionate fathers.

Who can comprehend the grief and suffering that this wicked rule caused?

Only God knows that.

In one moment, thousands of happy families were made unhappy, not because death had made a separation, but because one man, who dared to say he was the representative of Christ, commanded it. Terrible!

Here Gregory introduced a dreadful error that deeply invaded social life.

I need not tell you that this command is directly contrary to God's infallible Word. God Himself has instituted marriage, and He makes no exceptions for the clergy. They, too, may marry.

In the Old Testament times, among the people of Israel, the priests and the prophets were married. We can find enough instances of that. The New Testament shows that the apostles were married. For example, Peter was married because the Lord Jesus cured his sick mother-in-law. Philip, one of the seven deacons, was married. We may read this in the Acts of the Apostles, where Luke tells us that Paul lodged with him and his daughters. We don't read anywhere that God punished them for being married or that it was forbidden.

On the contrary, God promises that He will help those who are married. This promise also included preachers and prophets, for the Bible doesn't say anything about excluding them. But there is even more explicit proof from God's Word.

Just look up 1 Tim. 4. There we read in the first verse: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits, and *doctrines of demons*", and then we read further in the third verse:

"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods", etc.

Do you see what God's Word tells us there?

I'm not saying this; God is!

God calls it a 'doctrine of demons'! And it is, for God's Word is infallible.

By ordering and enforcing celibacy, Gregory wanted to separate the church from the world.

However, that rule caused the church to become thoroughly corrupt, for it induced many clergy members to commit adultery. Enough said.

However, I must point out one more thing. We told you in a previous chapter that there was already disagreement between the Eastern Church with Constantinople as its centre and the Western Church with Rome as its centre. Yet up till now, those churches were not entirely separated from each other. But when Gregory *forbade* marriage to the unmarried clergy and *commanded* the clergy who were already married to send their wives and children away, the clergy of the Eastern Church refused to obey that command. This papal command was why the Eastern and Western churches split from each other permanently. Because of that command, the Eastern Church wanted nothing to do with the Western Church anymore.

Gregory was trying to separate the church from the world. But he was doing it all wrong. According to God's Word, he introduced a doctrine of the devil here!

GREGORY FORBIDS SIMONY

However, Gregory was not finished with his 'reforms' yet. The third thing he forbade was *simony*.

In Acts 8, we read the history of Simon, the sorcerer. This chapter tells us that Philip the deacon travelled to Samaria to preach there. God blessed that preaching, and Philip could institute a church there. However, Philip was not allowed to baptise because he was a deacon. So the apostles Peter and John came to Samaria, and they officially baptised those who repented and laid their hands on them, by which the Holy Spirit came upon them. Simon, the sorcerer, lived in that city of Samaria. He joined the believers, and

the apostles baptised him too. But when he saw that the Holy Spirit came upon them by the laying on of hands, he offered money to Peter and John and said: "Give me also this power."

In other words: "Teach me that trick, too. I will pay you well."

He thought that he could buy spiritual gifts!

The buying of the special offices in the church was called 'simony', after Simon, the sorcerer. Gregory most strictly forbade that simony.

Did simony happen in the Roman church then? Indeed, it did. It happened very often. In the previous chapter, we

learned that the German emperors gave large tracts of land to some bishops, over which those bishops ruled. Because of that, those bishops became secular (earthly) rulers. Then, out of gratitude, those bishops gave a present to the emperor for giving them the land. It started quite simply. That gift was given as a token of appreciation, even though it was a bad practice.

But it did not stay simple. If that gift-giving had remained an occasional occurrence and did not become obligatory, continuing to be a small token of thanks, it was not so dangerous. However, gradually these gifts became a fixed custom, and the presents became too large. Not only did the gifts become more and more expensive, but eventually, the emperor expected the bishops to give him large sums of money for the land he gave them and the appointments that came with it. It happened regularly that the bishops would offer large sums of money to the emperor *before* he appointed them! And so, it gradually degenerated into *bribery*.

The emperor could make good use of that money. Emperors usually lived a lavish lifestyle. Also, the many wars the German emperors had to wage swallowed up heaps of cash. The emperor encouraged this bribery! Whoever would give the most had the best opportunity of being appointed as bishop by the emperor. The offices of the

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits, and doctrines of demons: "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods", 1 Tim 4:1 & 3

church were 'up for sale' to the highest bidder! The German emperor, as well as the kings, counts, and dukes, no longer considered who was the best man for the job, but who gave the most money! That was terrible!

Nothing was left of the gravity and the responsibility of the office.

It became a job where you could get respect and honour if you were willing to pay for it!

The rulers earned vast sums of money by practising this simony.

And now Gregory put a sudden, effective stop to that abominable practice. He strictly forbade the buying and selling of church offices. He excommunicated the rulers who made themselves guilty of simony and immediately deposed the appointed bishops. Gregory deserves commendation for stopping those wicked transactions because the office-bearers degraded themselves by joining in with it, and the people no longer had respect and reverence for the clergy. That was not surprising! It was a blessing for the



The sin of simony (The man in black offering money for a well-paid position.) Painting by Avanzino Nucci. Commons Wikimedia.org

church that Gregory forbade simony. Gregory not only forbade it but also enforced it.

GREGORY FORBIDS INVESTITURE

Investiture is the giving and receiving of a religious office from a secular ruler to a clergy member.

Secular rulers often appointed bishops and other members of the clergy. When the king appointed a bishop, then that new bishop received a ring and a sceptre. These were the tokens of their new dignity. That sceptre is a staff with beautiful scrollwork. The granting of the ring and staff was called "investiture". Gregory also forbade that custom. He said:



"The church itself shall provide for new bishops and other clerics. The secular rulers have no authority to do that."

In this, too, pope Gregory VII was correct. It was high time that this abuse of power stopped. When it is time to choose new elders and deacons, the mayor does not appoint them, does he? The mayor has nothing to do with it. The members of the congregation choose elders and deacons at a congregational meeting.

If the congregation needs a minister, neither the mayor nor the premier tells us which minister must come, do they? They have nothing to do with it. They may not interfere in those church matters. The members of the congregation call a minister at a congregational meeting.

The offices belong to the church and not to the state. Gregory acted very wisely in these things. Forbidding this was another effort to free the church from the world. We see that the little boy Hildebrand had become a man with great significance in church life.

His most important decisions were:

- Cardinals would appoint popes.
- Celibacy was ordered and strictly enforced.
- Simony was rigorously forbidden.
- Investiture was forbidden.

True, the Roman Catholic Church had strayed very far from the pure path of truth through all the errors it upheld.

The Roman Catholic Church was drowning in unbelief and superstition. Errors followed each other in quick succession.

But it would still be more than four centuries before the Reformation would come. During all those years, God's people were still in the Roman Catholic Church. If God had not given the Reformation, the church would have destroyed itself. The golden thread of God's reign also runs through this history. Gregory has been an instrument in God's hand to keep the church standing.

On the other hand, it is a pity that he also introduced ruinous errors. Just think of celibacy. You cannot find a single piece of Scriptural basis for this command.



Henry IV (1050 – 1106) <https://pictura-prints.com/>

Perhaps you ask: "But did the German emperors and the other secular rulers approve of all that? Did they allow themselves to be pushed aside just like that by one man, Gregory VII?"

Not at all! They opposed those papal commands with tooth and nail! A fierce struggle followed.

In the next chapter, we will learn something about the struggle between the popes and the secular rulers, especially between Gregory VII and the German emperor.

QUESTIONS

1. Give the early background of Hildebrand.
2. What became his main goal in life? How did he feel about the church-state relationship?
3. What did Hildebrand want the pope to become?
4. What change did he make regarding the selection of popes? How are popes selected today?
5. Define the term 'cardinal.'
6. What is celibacy?
7. What did Gregory VII ask the married clergymen to do? What was their reaction?
8. Explain how celibacy is contrary to God's Word.
9. How did the command to the celibate life affect the relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches?
10. What is simony? Explain the origin of the word.
11. How were the emperors bribed into granting offices?
12. What ruling did Gregory make regarding simony?
13. What is investiture?
14. What ruling did Gregory make regarding investiture?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Do you know of any other church denomination which practices or has practised investiture?
2. What are some of the dangers in the practice of investiture?