

THE GERMANIC MONARCHY  
OF THE MIDDLE AGES  
AND ITS POWER OVER THE CHURCH

"We have chosen our teacher, Lord Sylvester, as Pope, and ordained and created him by the grace of God." The Emperor Otto III wrote these words in the year 1001 in a document for Pope Sylvester II, the famous Gerbert von Aurillac.<sup>1</sup> It is not known that Gerbert protested against this remarkable formulation, and he accepted harsh words of reproof, also contained in this document, for the "carelessness and ignorance" of his predecessors. The latest of these predecessors on the chair of St. Peter had been Gregory V, a cousin of the emperor; and it had

Translated by T. Jaeger.

<sup>1</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae*, Othonis III diplomata, Nr. 389.

already become clear in his day what conclusions Otto drew from his views. When a Spanish bishop was to be removed, the emperor headed the synod which handled the matter together with the pope, and signed the document that Gregory released on this occasion. He ruled the church together with the popes, or through the popes, and was not the only one to do this.

Was this a victory of might over right? Such proceedings would have been unthinkable without military power over Rome; but it would be oversimplification to speak of force alone. An ideology stood behind the dealings of the emperor, an ideology with various roots: a different concept of the relationship between church and state from the one we have today. The concepts of state and church themselves were different from ours, particularly in the mind of the people—which was more important for practical action than the opinion of a few scholars. Popular thought was not overly concerned with clear definitions; it seemed more important that the content of these concepts should echo the thinking and feeling of the circles that were politically active.

For us, the state is a juridical person—not just the sum of all persons with political functions. It is an institution whose parts are sharply distinguished, and that is clearly limited from outside. Simpler conditions were accepted by the Germanic peoples; they counted on the things they could see and understand without abstractions—the king, the dukes, and counts, who were supposed to uphold peace and justice, and whose functions carried them over into areas which we would consider affairs of the church. The Germanic states were in the first place groups of people, and only in the second place institutions. It was similar in the case of the church—while its character as an institution could not be denied, the importance of persons was particularly stressed. One spoke of the pope, the bishops, the priests and the faithful; together with the rulers, the nobility and the freemen these were the “ecclesia,” that is, Christendom. Christendom had both a religious and a political purpose; but these were combined in their bearers. The most important seemed to be the emperor and the kings; they exercised the highest political function, but it was long customary to ascribe religious duties to them as well. The chronicler Jordanes tells that the Goths regarded their race

## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

of kings not as ordinary humans but as “demigods;”<sup>2</sup> and other peoples as well traced the genealogy of their dynasty back to a prehistoric hero, whose magical strength—the “salvation” and fortune of the family—was passed on to his heirs, predestining them to the dignity of kingship. Such a king was better able than other men to find the approach to supernatural powers, and could determine the fate of his people favorably with prayer and sacrifice.

The prayer and sacrifice of the king were religious functions, and at the same time political, for they concerned the “state.” The Germanic peoples also had priests, in the usual sense of the word, but their position was not significant; they remained members of the tribe and were subservient to its leaders. Neither the heathen or the arian priests wore a special costume that set them apart as members of a clerical hierarchy; they wore the clothes and golden bracelets of all free members of the tribe. When the Goths were on the march, their arian church marched with them; when they settled down, the church was a national church, with no connection to other churches. It was under the orders of the king, as was every other matter concerning the tribe as a whole.

At that time the relation between “state” and “church” was no problem. Things only became problematic when the Franks, and later the other Germanic tribes, became Catholic; their clergy was now supposed to become part of a greater whole, part of a firmly established, supranational organization. The kings did not draw from this fact all the consequences that were prescribed by canon law. They still named bishops and retained the power of confirming their election; they called up synods and influenced their decisions. In Gaul and Spain the Catholic clergy came largely from Roman families; but this clergy seldom made much of the connection with Rome and the universal church. In the last centuries of the late Roman Empire the senatorial families of Gaul and Spain had stopped hoping for help from the old capital; they were proud to be Roman Gauls or Spaniards. The church in these countries guarded jealously its own forms of the liturgical

<sup>2</sup> *Getica*, XIII, 78.

cult. In Arles, "Gallic Rome,"<sup>3</sup> a Metropolitan was in power who had received the care of the Faith in Gaul and Spain from the pope after the conflict with Rome (513-14).

Just as the noble families in the provinces of the empire had once supplied the administration with officials, they now supplied the kings with religious officials—and were quite pleased to fulfill political functions in the secular sphere at the same time. They supported the kingdom, and were supported by it, against the unfavorable tendencies of the Germanic nobility. Among these tendencies was the habit of some landowners of founding parish churches or cloisters on their property, and then keeping them under their thumb and ruling the clergy. We hear the first protest of a high priest against this procedure in the middle of the sixth century—a procedure that was extremely beneficial to the cultivation of the land, but deprived the bishop of parts of his diocese and his clergy. Modern research calls this institution "private church." It carried into the private sphere that which was normally in the public, and shows that the nobility was now ruling next to the king. Even Charlemagne and St. Louis were not able to abolish the "private church"—indeed it flourished most conspicuously in the ninth and tenth centuries. When the Carolingian monarchy fell, the nobility in large parts of France ruled in this way over bishoprics, appointed bishops out of their own families and disposed of church property.

The concept of "private church" strengthened the tendency of the kingdom to dispose of the clergy and its property wherever possible. While the secular officials became vassals in the process of "feudalization," a much stricter rule was frequently the lot of the clergy—the "right of benefice" applied to non-vassals. Already under Charlemagne, actual conditions were far removed from the demands of canon law; they became still farther removed when the Saxon kings renewed the monarchy in central Europe. At their sides stood the dukes and other nobles of the tribe's dukedoms. It was not enough to be chosen as king; one had to maintain oneself as king. This the king accomplished first and foremost by placing his own relatives or vassals in the important positions that were in the hands of the nobility. In rivalry with

<sup>3</sup> Ausonius, *Ordo urbium nobilium*, v. 74.

## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

the rights of the nobility, and in the form of these rights, what we call the "Ottonic Empire-Church" was founded. About this we will have more to say.

The power of a king over the church of his lands was a matter of practical politics, and did not require scholarly thought; indeed, one can say it existed because scholarly thought was not consulted. When this was changed, when they tried to support the facts—which they were defending in the battle over investiture—with written grounds, the royal position became not stronger but weaker. The Roman empire and the Roman church of late antiquity were ruled by "droit écrit," while the Germanic states preferred "coûtume" for the ordering of political and religious matters. The Roman *imperium* could never have survived without books, documents and written instructions; but the state of the Franks, even in Carolingian times, could.

This required the social and political circumstances of an archaic time, which could not last forever. One began to distinguish between laws, so that these swiftly lost their vital power; the old myths began to give way before new, rational ways of thinking. The Merovingians ruled as "holy" kings, and the Carolingian family too considered its position sanctified. But here there is a significant difference: it was said of the ancestor of Clodwig, that he was descended from a "bestia Neptuni Minotauri similis," a mythical creature in the form of a bull that came out of the sea;<sup>4</sup> but a Christian saint, Bishop Arnulf of Metz, stands at the beginning of the Carolingian genealogy. The Merovingian king had a direct connection with God or the gods; Pippin and Charlemagne, to make up for this lack, received the anointment of the church. It is not a coincidence that Charlemagne took the words "dei gratia" in his title as king; in a lesser degree this was the same change as that which led from the ancient "divine emperor" to an "emperor by the grace of God." The ruler was still excepted from the number of ordinary people; but the halo surrounding him came from his office, not from his person.

This office was given by God, and human society manifested the will of God through its ceremonies: the laity chose the king, the priests anointed and crowned him. According to the king's

<sup>4</sup> Fredegar, *Chronica*, III, c. 9.

point of view, this did not mean that they had power over the one they crowned; he could rule the church the way he ruled the laity. It is possible that some prelates thought differently; these differences of opinion led to bitter battles in later times. As far as the concept of the state is concerned, one sees that the office of the king reaches beyond his person and his family; and so the way is clear to seeing in the monarchy an abstract creation, a juridical person beside the physical one. One saw the insignia of rule, the royal throne and the royal domains: they remained when the king died, and the "kingdom," or what one later called the "crown," was concentrated in them.

At the time of the Salic emperors the chronicler Wipo wrote: "When the king has been destroyed, the kingdom remains, just as a ship remains although her pilot has fallen."<sup>5</sup> The use of an image coming from classical tracts shows the origin of the aid needed for the adoption of such a concept of the state. This concept was on the way, for it wasn't quite established yet; when Wipo spoke of the "res publica" he meant something different from the ancient Romans, namely the property of the king. The two things were parallel: the power of the king and the duty of the pilot towards the owner of the ship. This owner was not the people but God, the true and real Sovereign, to whom the monarch would be accountable on the Day of Judgement.

The theocratic concept was the firm foundation of the kingdom, and was strengthened by the receipt of imperial dignity. We know how things happened;<sup>6</sup> the papacy needed a protector against the Langobards, and could expect nothing from the officials of the Byzantine emperor, still the nominal superior of Rome and of the popes. The Frankish armies, which marched into Italy, and the title "patricius," which Pippin and Charlemagne were addressed, were sufficient protection. But the West had not forgotten the fact that Christendom had once been united in a great empire; and this could be forgotten even less since Byzantium still claimed to rule over all Europe. Byzantium had the legitimate title, and

<sup>5</sup> *Gesta Chuonradi*, c. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Heinrich Fichtenau, "Naissance de l'Empire médiéval." *Diogenes*, 2, 1953, p. 43 ff.

## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

the Franks had the power over large parts of Europe. Charlemagne had risen far above the rank of a king of the Franks and Langobards. How could one better describe his power than by calling him emperor?

The imperial coronation protected the popes, and gave the Frankish kingdom an ideological support that was stronger than the anointment. Arnulf, the personal forebear of Charlemagne, was less important than the series of predecessors in the office of emperor. These he ordered depicted at Ingelheim in the Palatinate, as the owner of a castle does his ancestors: Constantine, Theodosius, Charles Martel, Pippin and Charlemagne stand side by side.<sup>7</sup> The king of the Franks had become the pilot of the Roman empire (*Romanum gubernans imperium*), that can be equated with Christendom even if it did not quite equal the scope of the latter. The pilot, not the "autocrator," as the Byzantine emperor styled himself: they wanted to be more Christian than the Byzantines, who had retained semi-heathen concepts of the person of the ruler. Charlemagne's court was shocked that the Byzantines spoke of the "divine ears" of the *Basileus* and believed that he ruled together with Christ. Christ was the only and true ruler, who had entrusted imperial duties to the man Charles.

But essential Byzantine conceptions of the imperial power did have their parallels in the west, either because they had already existed here or because a Roman-Byzantine model was adopted. If the emperor was God's viceroy, God had to lead his actions and dictate to him the laws that he gave his subjects; these were laws not only in the secular sphere, but such as affected the clergy and made religion his responsibility. Just as in Byzantium, the preservation of orthodoxy was the monarch's duty. Even before 800, Charlemagne had called together a Council in Frankfurt, at which he held the chair and was active as a theologian. Now he had all his subjects swear an oath to live pious and godfearing lives; his words were sermons. At a later time the emperors still underscored their spiritual responsibility by giving sermons—Frederick II gave one in the cathedral of Pisa, in defiance of the pope's ban. It was a matter of course that Charlemagne chose bishops, administered church property when there was a vacancy,

<sup>7</sup> Ermoldus Nigellus, *In honorem Hludovici IV*, v. 245 ff.

and forced other bishops to attend him at court, where they had to take up permanent residence instead of administering their dioceses. In this way Frankish customs and concepts were continued by the new idea of unconditional imperial power—just as Charlemagne, in addition to his new title, still bore the old one of King of the Franks and Lombards. The new dignity was less important in terms of actual power than in the magical effect it had on generations who were more impressed by these things than is modern man. In the East, the cult of the imperial person had been enough to hold together an empire composed of extremely heterogeneous elements; in the West, the new authority surrounded the emperor like a shining mantle—but he still remained the king of the Franks.

Historians cannot agree whether Leo III was the initiator of the coronation, or whether he lent his hand to complete plans originating in Aix. It is certain that the Franks had such plans. It is also certain that the pope was not “a man of overpowering intellectual qualities,” as some have thought (W. Ohnsorge); on the other hand one cannot call him “a pathetic figure,” as others have done (F. Ganshof). He placed the imperial crown on the head of the king, and then fell at the feet of Charlemagne according to the Byzantine custom of “adoring” the emperor. It is a matter of personal preference which of the two actions one chooses to regard as characteristic.

One cannot deny the autocratic features of Charlemagne’s rule over the church, but one must add that it was more measured than that of some of his successors in the imperial office. He approached the popes with reverence, and did not treat them like Frankish bishops. This became different when Otto I went to Rome and renewed the empire. His rule encompassed a smaller part of Christendom than that of the Carolingians, but his demands on the church and the popes were greater. This can be explained by the Saxon mentality; by the undeserving character of parts of the clergy in those bad times of the dissolution of the old political order; and also by the great importance given the idea of the “private church.” When the emperor placed a firmly organized “imperial church” next to and above the churches of the nobility, he served the purposes of the clergy as well as of the monarchy, since in this way the clergy was spared the



## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

complete and utter dissolution of its rights. Here, beyond the limits of canonic freedom, the prelates found peace, material support and a rich field of action in the service of the state.

Doing political service for the king—going to war for him or accompanying him to Italy—imposed burdens on a bishop and his diocese. If he was a nobleman, he had to regard these burdens as light compared with the honor brought by serving the king, and compared with the advantages that would accrue to his family from these services. A large part of the German and Italian clergy of this period came from noble families, who sent their younger sons to the clergy so as not to make their property smaller by subdividing it. There were many cloisters that always chose a noble abbot, and in the time between St. Louis and Henry II not a single bishop was chosen from non-free families. But the aristocratic element in the clergy would not have been very significant if entering the church had meant renouncing worldly ties to family and king. If the church was to be equated with Christendom, these ties had to continue in force. Prelates received their benefices from their families, or from the king, who invested them with the insignia of their office—perhaps a bishop's staff. More important than a candidate's vocation was his political dependability.

The royal "chapel" served as a school for service in the kingdom's church. This "chapel" was a group of persons who lived in various parts of the kingdom, and were at the king's disposal for diplomatic services, the preparation of documents and other such purposes, when the king traveled in their vicinity or called them to his court. Royal service was richly rewarding for these priests: most of them received benefices in cathedral chapters or collegiate churches that were at the king's disposal. And a chaplain who proved his worth could count on the office of bishop or abbot. Under the Ottonic dynasty the bearers of royal benefices in a single cathedral chapter, Hildesheim (in Saxony), became archbishops of Cologne and Mainz and bishops of Metz, Trier and Augsburg.

Some priests, devoted servants of the king, received secular offices from him as well. It was a matter of the rights of counts, which were taken by bishops, and in one case even the rights of a duke: Bishop Bruno, the brother of Otto I, became the Duke of Lorraine

in 953. It was a matter of course that he was eager to put the priestly and secular offices of the country in the hands of the dynasty, by making his relations and Saxon pupils bishops and counts; and even his own successor in the dukedom came from this number. The advantage of this policy of making the clergy supporters of the empire was that their offices and property were not inherited, as in the case of secular dukes and counts, but reverted to the king. The clergy was a substitute for the modern concept of civil servants, which was unknown, and an influence against the natural tendencies of the feudal system.

Archbishop Wilhelm of Mainz, an illegitimate son of Otto the Great, wrote to the pope in 955,<sup>8</sup> complaining bitterly about conditions in the German church: "Dukes and counts dispose of the offices of bishops, and bishops take over the activities of dukes." The second clause was aimed at Bruno, the first at Duke Henry of Bavaria, who had imprisoned the Archbishop of Salzburg and divided his ecclesiastical property among his own vassals. Such protests were very rare; usually the German rule over the church was regarded as a matter of course. For example, a chronicler tells the following story as if it were simply the way things would always be. The Bishop of Worms, a young man, had been in Italy with Otto III for a long time, and asked Otto, in the case of his (the bishop's) death, to give the bishopric to his brother. Otto promised, but "after the death of the bishop there were many others asking the emperor for favor in this matter, and Erpho was made bishop; when he died, three days later, there were again many others who besieged the emperor with pleas and promises of money. The most persistent was one Razo, who promised much, and received the bishop's staff; but he had hardly returned from Italy when he, too, died. When messengers returned to the emperor with the staff, he closed his hand and promised not to fill the post until he was back in Germany."<sup>9</sup> The clergy of Worms, who should have elected the bishop according to canon law, and the pope, who should have confirmed his election, were not consulted at all.

<sup>8</sup> Ph. Jaffé, *Monumenta Moguntina*, (Berlin 1866) 347, Nr. 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Vita Burchardi episcopi*, *Monumenta Germaniae*, Scriptores, IV, 834.

## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

It was logical to carry this system of the Ottonic church over into Italy as well. In Lombardy one could fall back on the native aristocracy, the descendants of those families who had already been supporters of the Carolingian dynasty. The fact that the Ottonic emperors entrusted important bishoprics to them helped to make foreign rule bearable. It was different in Rome; the nobility of the city in which the pope had his seat and the emperors were crowned had become used to having at their glorious disposal the papacy and the shadow of the imperial title that a Guido, a Lambert or a Louis the Blind had borne. The Ottonic dynasty broke these tendencies with military means, and in the course of this treated some popes in a manner which would have shocked German bishops. John XII, son of the Lord of the Eternal City and himself a representative of Roman independence, was called before a synod gathered together by Otto I, and accused of a breach of sworn faith; a partisan of the emperor took his place. The new pope was driven out when the German troops withdrew, and later still brought back by force. Otto did not recognize a pope freely elected by the clergy and people of Rome; he decided these matters from Germany. The emperor should rule the Roman church just as he did the German. We hear nothing of imperial decisions in theological matters, as was the case under Charlemagne; but in return the disciplinary force and supervision of the patrimony of Saint Peter was all the greater. We already mentioned the words which Otto III used about Sylvester II.

The son of Otto II and a Byzantine princess learned from his father how one ruled over the royal clergy, and he knew the position the "autocrator of the Romans" took towards the Eastern clergy. He loved long conversations with holy hermits, but he could treat the secular priests with the brevity of a military order. He named an Archbishop of Cologne in a note of telegraphic style: "Otto, Emperor by the grace of God, grants the Archilothete Heribert his grace, gives him Cologne and an ell of pallium."<sup>10</sup> It was a nasty joke to measure the pallium, a symbol of the fullness of papal power that the pope gave metropolitans

<sup>10</sup> Lambert, *Vita Heriberti Coloniensis*, c. 5, *Monumenta Germaniae, Scriptores*, IV, 743.

as a sign of their special connection with the apostolic chair, with a merchant's measure.

No one would question Otto's high religious convictions, and his great consciousness of responsibility for the fate of the Roman church. The way in which this consciousness expressed itself corresponded with the emperor's idea of his power and with the idea of the "private church." It would, of course, have required many generations to make this power over the papacy a matter of common law, and thereby to dispose of the written law—which did partly occur north of the Alps. Above all, to bring this about the emperor would have had to take up permanent residence in Rome, and this was impossible: when Otto tried, it led to a catastrophe. Such appearances of imperial power over the popes occurred only once more, under the Salic Henry III, at the famous synod of Sutri in 1046. Here Henry determined the removal of Sylvester III and his successor, Gregory VI, and made a Saxon—Clement II, Bishop of Bamberg—the new pope. Clement was a stranger in Rome, and even as pope did not give up his bishopric; as bishop he had to follow the orders of the king, and as pope he belonged to the emperor who protected him from the Roman nobility.

Even when later rulers made similar arrangements, it was no longer the same thing: these were actions in the battle with a papacy that was very conscious of its power and of its rights, and that was driving the emperors back from their former positions step by step. We will not describe the battle of investiture, or the fights of the Staufens with the papacy; the course of these controversies was determined by personalities, and many shattering occurrences that they brought with them could have been avoided if the temperament of the respective regents of the church and the empire had allowed this. The political explosions were not necessary; inevitable was the evolution which led from the archaic forms of society to the modern ones.

One began to differentiate more strongly between the religious and political spheres, even in popular thought, and each was given its own right and its own personnel. The state became more of an institution than it had formerly been, and the church stressed her own nature, that institutional character to which the laity had until then not given much thought. The "sacerdotium" was distinguished from the "regnum" within Christendom, and both bodies

## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

took on a more concrete shape through this differentiation. It would be a long time before this process was completed for the state. It moved more swiftly in the West than in Germany, where the "sacrum imperium" continued to exist with all the universal demands that, either latently or openly, stood in conflict with the demands of "sancta ecclesia."

The church was now first and foremost the clergy, ruled by the successor of Peter. Gregory VII had declared publicly that there could be only one highest power, the papal power, and that all human arrangements—including therefore the empire—were only aids for the purpose of bringing Christendom to God. It is disputed, whether in earlier times the papacy had already put forth the thesis that it held a monarchical position, with the secular sovereigns in a subsidiary function as protectors of the church. At any rate, under Gregory and some of his successors this hierocratic concept led to far-reaching consequences: Gregory VII wrote that only the pope was entitled to use imperial insignia, and he took oaths of allegiance from a number of European lords. He deposed Henry IV when the latter tried to depose him, and wanted to cut all ties of the German bishops to the king at one blow. Such programs did not aim at a separation of church and state in the modern sense, but continued to defend a unity of "christianitas," which was supposed to be a Christendom under the leadership of the pope instead of that of the emperor. The words written by Boniface VIII to King Albrecht of Habsburg in 1303 formulate the grounds for this very clearly: "Just as the moon has no light of its own, but receives that of the sun, so no earthly power (*potestas*) has anything beyond that which it receives from the power of the church... Every power originates with Christ, and with us as the Vicar of Jesus Christ."<sup>11</sup> Pius XII quoted these words and added: "Cette conception médiévale était conditionnée par l'époque."<sup>12</sup> Leo XIII had already stressed several times that both state and church were sovereign in their own separate realms.

Not all popes went as far as Gregory VII and Boniface VIII,

<sup>11</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae*, Constitutiones, iv/1, 139, Nr. 173.

<sup>12</sup> *Discours au Xème Congrès International des Sciences Historiques*, 7 September 1955.

and not all canonists have defended the "hierocratic" doctrine. Research is now being done to determine whether, in the time between the two popes, a continuity of this "dualistic" concept approaching the modern one can be found among theologians. It is conspicuous that such theses as aided a compromise between empire and papacy were frequently expressed by the imperial side. Certainly there were people like Benzo von Alba, who ascribed to the successor of the Caesars all power over the clergy and the pope, since he was the "viceroys of the Creator," "sent from Heaven, no mortal man"<sup>13</sup>—but he was a poet, whose declamations could not replace the natural power of the imperial idea, and did not have the clarity of the deductions of the canonists. The imperial side had trusted too long in the possession of power and the agreement of popular thought within Christendom; when this power receded, and the ideology was made hollow by the reflections of the canonists, the emperor tried to approach the problem from the rights of the old "imperatores." But only seldom did they dare to maintain this in its entirety; more frequently they retreated to the compromise solution, which gave both emperor and pope their due.

In 1130 the dome of the church in the Bavarian cloisters at Pruefening, near Regensburg, was decorated with a large painting showing "sancta ecclesia" sitting on a throne with imperial symbols in her hands, according to the popes' views. Below her the saints can be seen, and below these the emperor. His arms are raised in prayer, as is proper for a layman, and the halo that used to decorate pictures of the emperor is no longer around his head. In another Bavarian cloister, in Tegernsee, the emperor was favored; at the time of Barbarossa the religious "Play of Antichrist" was produced here. The personification of the church was enthroned on a wooden platform, in the old style, together with the emperor, the pope, the nobles and the clergy. Here the popular unity of Christendom and harmony among the two highest powers, denied in Pruefening, were still alive.

If, according to the dualistic theory, the power of the emperor came not from the pope but from God, and if in addition the

<sup>13</sup> *Liber ad Heinricum IV, Monumenta Germaniae, Scriptorum*, XI, S. 609, 669. Walter Ullmann, *Die Machtstellung des Papsttums im Mittelalter*, (1960) 566.

## *The Germanic Monarchy and the Church*

regent was allowed certain rights over the clergy, then the dangers that threatened from the canonists became fewer. How far the emperor could go in his anticlerical policies became a question of actual power; and Barbarossa, trusting to this power, went quite far. But his power was too weak when confronted with the coalition of the papacy with the cities of northern Italy. A new epoch was dawning, in which certainly the empire continued to exist; but its myth lost power over the minds of men and became a fairy tale about the great emperor who was sleeping in a mountain while waiting for a new and better time. This epoch did not belong to the universal powers, but to the kings of western Europe, to the nobility in Germany, and the citizens in Lombardy and Flanders. A new absolutism arose out of this period which at a first, superficial glance seems to be the same as the rule of the Germanic kings and emperors of an earlier time. But if one looks more closely, there is a clear difference between an archaic time, that really believed its rulers to be of divine origin or the bearers of a divine office, and a new time, that was no longer prepared to believe this.

When in 1609 King James of England declared to Parliament that kings ruled by divine right, this was similar to Emperor Charles VI's having himself celebrated as Hercules or Louis XIV's becoming Apollo. We are in the realm of late, ungenue myths, that led a ghostly life long after their time had actually passed. The continuity of the requisites of this propaganda of the rulers, for which there are many examples, is astonishing. It is to be remembered that the predecessors of the "roi soleil" in Versailles are to be found in the Emperor Frederick II, in Constantine, in the hellenistic kings, and even in the Babylonian monarchy. In Babylon the people were convinced that the king was the earthly embodiment of the sun god; here we have the genuine, archaic myth.

It is similar with the figure of Charlemagne, an historical personality that became a mythical one. When Otto III descended into the grave of the emperor, he believed that he was coming not only into historical contact but actually into personal contact with his great predecessor. Later genealogists have shown great industry in their attempts to prove the desired relationship with Charlemagne for every European dynasty; his name appears

constantly in their family trees. It is difficult to say how much of this came from pure vanity, that wanted the father of Europe as a relative, and how much it corresponded to a genuine belief that the power of a mythical ancestor was present in his descendants. In some cases they were emulating Charlemagne's political concepts: he became the symbol of hegemony over the Occident, and remained so after the end of the old empire. Napoleon wanted to make Charlemagne's insignia his own, and to pattern his imperial policies on those of Charlemagne, including those towards the Roman church: in 1811 he planned to call a Council of the Occident, so that "l'Eglise de son Empire soit une par la discipline comme elle l'est par la foi." Already in 1806 he wrote about his relationship to the papacy in words that could have come from Otto III: "Je fais connaître au pape mes intentions; s'il n'y acquiesce pas, je le réduirai à la même condition qu'il était avant Charlemagne."

This remained within the framework of an historical reminiscence; but tendencies of Napoleon can be recognized that were directed toward a closer, quasi-mythological bond with his predecessor in the imperial office. He tried to give the city of Aix its old dignity, making it the seat of a diocese, and allowing the city to present him with some relics of Charlemagne and with his so-called talisman. And the reasons that he gave Pius VII for his action expressed something that none of the mediaeval emperors had said: "Je suis Charlemagne, l'épée de l'Eglise, leur empereur."<sup>14</sup> Napoleon was the child of an epoch that measured all facts with the measure of reason, and had let the old empire collapse because it had not corresponded to this measure. Even Empress Maria Theresia had designated his crown as an object for fools ("ein Narrenhäubel"), and no one could believe the old legend that the fall of the empire would mean the end of the world. Nevertheless we see, and not in the case of Napoleon alone, that power in modern times still likes to wear the cloak of myth—especially when in its relationship with religion. History does not repeat itself, and it does not progress from the past in a straight line; time and time again its ways lead in the vicinity of that which we would like to call "out of date."

<sup>14</sup> A. Kleinclausz, *Charlemagne*, (1934) 394.