

John S. OTT

Bishops, Authority and community in Northwestern Europe c. 1050-1150

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Professor of Medieval European History at Portland State University, owner of a PhD in History at Stanford University, and editor of some interesting books like: *Between Sword and Prayer: Warfare and Medieval Clergy in Cultural Perspective* (Explorations in Medieval Culture 3) (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 2017), together with the Editor, with Radosław Kotecki and Jacek Maciejewski, *Saintly Bishops and Bishops' Saints. Proceedings of the 2010 Hagiotheca Conference, Poreč, Croatia*, (Hagiotheca, Zagreb, 2012), together with Trpimir Vedriš, or *The Bishop Reformed: Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages* (Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2007) together with Anna Trumbore Jones, John S. Ott is a contemporary researcher deeply involved in the investigation of the history of the Christianity in Middle Ages.

His work entitled: *Bishops, Authority and community in Northwestern Europe*, published at Cambridge University Press shows his serious concern on topics like the authority of the bishop in the aforementioned period. Segmented into nine big chapters and followed by an interesting conclusion (pp. 309-217), an appendix (pp. 318-326), a bibliographical list (pp. 327-367) and by an index (pp. 367-700), it offers an overview on the problematic of the bishop and his authority in the space of North-Western Europe between 1050-1150 speaking about the challenges that have threatened this authority, examples of Saints who understood in a very special way their mission and their relationship with the authority but also the

way how it was exercised in situations of peace and conflict.

Among the important questions addressed by the author in his methodological approach, there are: «What did it mean to be a bishop in an age of impressive, and at times, destabilizing, social, religious, and institutional transformation? Contemporaries, both lay and clerical, considered: how should a bishop conduct himself? What should his priorities be, and how should he arrange them while managing the daily demands of his office? What was the appropriate balance between one's personal spiritual care and engaged governance, between de pastor's call to lead (*praesse*) and the simultaneous injunction to serve (*prodesse*)? Was it possible for a bishop to maintain administrative autonomy and flexibility and still fully obey papal authority?» (p. 7).

To all these questions, but also to some others, he will try to answer in the chapters of his book. If in the first one of them (p. 1-26), there are mentioned aspects of the general context, methodological questions and some examples related with bishops' reign inside the investigated space, in the second one (pp. 27-67), he speak about (the fact of) being bishop and its meaning. Starting from the assertion: «in the Middle Age, bishops were not born, they were made» (p. 27), he speaks about the process of election of bishops, the offices from where they were appointed in their diocesan work, but he also offers a list of the bishops that ruled in the investigated period. He shows, for example, how, through their work canons started to gain

authority and privileges in their work and how they became, because of that, very influential and favourite for election as bishops. Therefore, he notes the fact that: «Along with real estate, canons also accumulated dignities and offices, often in different towns, and the prebends accruing to them. Three examples are furnished by canons simultaneously attached to the chapters of Tournai and Chambrai, each connected with the two leading families of Tournai, the Avesnes and the just-mentioned Osmonds» (p. 43).

Then, in another interesting chapter (pp. 68-110), John Ott is emphasizing the challenges of the episcopal authority, speaking about the way how political or ecclesiastical interests, but also ecclesiastical questions or local problems have contributed to the change of some bishops and also to the shifting of some important ideas about authority. The next chapter (pp. 111-153), contains also a presentation of the way how in the archdiocese of Reims were established different networks in the investigated period. The author speaks here both about the way how the bishops tried to increase their authority by establishing relationships with influential persons and families of the time, but also between each other, creating, in some situations, structures of real collegiality.

The fifth chapter (pp. 154-196) is latter dedicated to the revival of archiepiscopal autobiography and the development of panegyrics, veneration of relics or books that present history of places or of the bishops, while the sixth one (pp. 197-221) is dedicated to an example of sanctity and to the way how a behaviour from this category increased the episcopal authority between 1051 and 1076. The investigation

is continued with the presentation of evolution of relationships between bishop's authority and the civil one between 1073 and 1164 (pp. 222-256), while the eighth one (pp. 257-282) is focused on the role of preaching and writing in increasing or decreasing bishop's authority. The author speaks there about the importance of preaching, its content in the mentioned ages and offers examples of bishops who were good preachers. Impressed by Mil of Therouanne's preaching qualities, the author presented in a detailed way the main points of his work in this area.

In the last of the thematic units (pp. 283-308) entitled: «Toil and together in the vineyards of the lord» the author speaks about the relationships between the bishops from neighbouring spaces, investigating the dynamics of these relationships and their role in the increasing of bishop authority. Then, in conclusions (pp. 309-318), he recaps the most important points emphasized in the book and shows how, in some situations, a certain way to behave of some bishops contributed to the increasing of his authority or to its decreasing.

Written in an interesting way, offering to the reader a huge amount of information which is not only emphasized but also analysed by the author, the book is surely an important contribution not only for the study and understanding of the history of Medieval Church in the aforementioned space, but also for the medieval history, because it contains references to the interference between religion and politics.

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