

HUGH OF DIE AND THE LEGATINE OFFICE UNDER GREGORY VII:

ON THE EFFECTS OF A WANING ADMINISTRATION

Under Pope Gregory VII (1073-85), church reformers came to rely on papal legates as instruments for relieving both administrative and legislative pressures. Struggling to administer the vast and distant regions of Christendom, to manage the innumerable ecclesiastical cases that were filtering into Rome from the provinces, and more generally in coming to terms with the inadequacies of his government, Gregory placed increasing trust in this branch of papal government. Acting on behalf of whatever belongs to the well-being of the Roman Church, legates under Gregory VII were commissioned in matters of reform and law, to care for the salvation and general welfare of the Lord's flock. (1) Exercising powers of authority and jurisdiction, they were crucial vehicles of reform, itinerant courts and judges, instruments sent to the scene of a dispute for extending papal influence to the threshold (*ad limina*) of Western Christendom. Legates of this period were thus, in essence, preservers of justice, 'empowered to bring action against those who violated church law, and at the same time as judges, commissioned to hear and decide cases in the pope's name and with the force of papal authority.' (2)

The legatine office as it existed in the late 11th century, however, was very much an *ad hoc* institution. Yet, significantly, there was no other branch of the papal machinery that possessed the legal authority and knowledge to root itself right in the midst of provincial politics. It was to this office that Gregory entrusted a greater part of his reforming initiative, and it was his ability to mobilise this office (while hand-picking its members) that has led modern historians to recognise it as distinctly 'Gregorian' in nature and function. Adapting to suit the administrative and legal needs

(1) *Das Register Gregors VII* [hereafter *Reg.*], ed. Erich CASPAR (MGH, *Epistolae Selectae*, 2), Berlin, 1920-23; English translation by H.E.J. COWDREY, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, Oxford, 2002, V, 2.

(2) JAMES A. BRUNDAGE, *Medieval Canon Law*, London, 1995, p. 42.