3.

Structural Problems of Medieval Social History of Europe: Ideal types and the Specific Meaning of the Words in Latin Sources

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In contradistinction to conventional historiography, it is the purpose of the present essay to stress the role and significance of the lower classes in the development of medieval society. Following Cahnman's and Boskoff's felicitous suggestion of a reunion and rapprochement between sociology and history,[1] a deliberate attempt will be made to combine the insights of a historiography that is not wholly ideographic with those of a sociology that is not completely nomothetic. The interpenetration of social science and history has long been frustrated by the application of ideal types and concepts employed in the analysis of modern societies and situations as if there were no differences in the human conditions of the past and the present. Words like "the state" were readily used to characterize the public order of medieval Europe, although medieval man spoke only of "rule" (*Herrschaft*) as equivalent of the ancient Roman Empire. As Jean Bodin has pointed out, *superioritas territorialis*, based on *advocatia*, not sovereignty, was the ancient principle, legally affirmed by the Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648).[2]

O. Hintze and O. Brunner made a promising start in bringing sociological insight and methodology to medieval and modern history after K. Lamprecht had failed to persuade or even interest German historians with his *Economic History*. I therefore insisted after 1945 that German historiography's greatest need was not a renaissance of Ranke, still the ideal of many contemporary historians, but the acceptance of Max Weber. The collapse of the Third Reich had inevitably brought to an end the analysis of history — especially German history — exclusively in terms of *étatisme* and national state; it was time to look for new factors such as society, communal history, cooperation, liberty or representative institutions. However, before German historians had fully accepted Max Weber and the social

sciences, a change in mental attitudes and a return to conservative views interrupted this process, affected many minds and brought about a setback in the influence of sociology in the fields of politics and human evolution, particularly in the empirical disciplines, and not in Germany alone.

Although sociology and social or societal history are often accused of being liberal sciences, there is no doubt that no science should be characterized in this manner since the fundamental aim of any science is to find the truth and describe reality. Of course, any history has some conservative implication insofar as it follows the traces of the past in order to reconstruct past society and mankind. But there can also be no doubt that social science and history have the effect of changing firm and orthodox views of men and the human past because history, according to Max Weber, is the social act of the individual in a changing society and civilization. "Change" as a basic factor of history besides "continuity" was invented after World War II. In any case I dislike using the concept of conservative and of liberal (non-conservative) history but prefer real, human, rational, emotional, continuous history in the long-range sense or, according to F. Braudel, changing, evolutionary and revolutionary history. We must distinguish between the historians' conservative and liberal ideologies as became clear during the recent German historical discussions on Fascism and Hitler and on society and the structure of government (conference at the German Historical Institute in London).

Today the structural concept of this question is represented by W. and H. Mommsen, M. Broszat, Tim Mason, and the individualistic concept by H. Hildebrand, K.D. Bracher, A. Hillgruber, E. Jaeckel. Out of the discussions of structural theories of fascism and of the "historical autonomy" of National Socialism as a "phenomenon sui generis" emerge Ranke's thesis and question whether a historical epoch is to be understood in itself or only from higher categories and aspects. The structuralists defend the view, based on their research, that Hitlerism was the "revolution of the petit bourgeois" and corresponded to the authoritarian mentality of the German lower middle class. But Hitler succeeded also, by representing himself as the idol of the man in the street, in convincing the majority of the indifferent and hostile working class and in integrating them despite the fact that he did not raise their standard of living. Only a hermeneutically sensitive attitude, not historical positivism, will solve the historical problems of National Socialism and the German people.[3] It is a curious phenomenon that near the end of the twentieth century historians have not yet reached a proper consensus on the methods of understanding and analyzing history, and that many rely only on the individualistic view of Ranke whose reputation is, however, not in question. It is interesting to note that 200 years of revolutions, mass and labor movements, nationalism and nation-states, of popular parties, public opinion and worldwide propaganda by mass media,

of technological and industrial development and global civilization have not been able to convince historians that besides great men and little men the collective forces of society are no less dominant and decisive in history.

The reason for this is the limitation to modern and contemporary history, of the complex research needed for structural analysis and comparison, excluding medieval and early history although they need it as much as contemporary history which is the special target of combined social and economic research.[4] The German notion of "social" covers only modern economic society, not the entire concept of society and societal.[5] There can be no doubt that the Middle Ages are not only, as Ranke says, the field of action for popes, bishops, and monks, as well as emperors, kings, dukes and noblemen, but also the scene of a developing European society and civilization, a structural system of changing patterns and collective forces which becomes evident through comparison and complexity of viewpoints.

I focus in this essay on the rise of medieval society from the end of the tenth to the beginning of the fourteenth century because I believe that besides modern and contemporary society no other one is of such reality and interest for a socio-historical approach as this period, not only due to its model character but also because of its European-wide relevance to the nineteenth and twentieth centures.[6] My attempt to produce a structural analysis of medieval society and civilization was primarily concerned with the problem of usage of ideal types and concepts and the specific meaning of the relevant words in Latin and from national sources of the Middle Ages. In order to avoid unnecessary generalizations and useless positivism and artificiality, to demonstrate continuity and change, and to provide a convincing general and detailed picture of what we call European society and culture, concepts and patterns had to be found which could be used as continuous signposts in a changing world and history and could be understood as similar (anthropologically) elements of human action and life above all societal changes. These concepts and patterns, although taken from modern sociology, social science and contemporary history, had to correspond to words and concepts in medieval sources at least as far as the facts they expressed. No modern concept should be introduced that has no medieval equivalent in spite of specific differences.

In our days of profound social changes and predominant human, social and democratic demands and trends, states and governments are as extant and effective as ever but they have lost their reputations and are deteriorating. Instead, freedom and liberty are not only civil and moral values for all but are also decisive factors and aspirations of modern human, social and political development, and of primary concern to the historian. Liberty is equivalent to emancipation and liberation, both of which are basic elements of our society and civilization. Other fundamentals of modern and contemporary culture and progress are labor, labor movements, efficiency,

profit, union and cooperation. A third crucial feature of our life is the poverty of whole tribes, nations and continents, and the proletarian way of life of many, many individuals. I hope to show that those factors of modern and contemporary history and evolution were also decisive in the rise of European society and civilization during the so called High Middle Ages. I believe this to be true because we find the same concepts and words with a similar meaning in the historical development especially of the eleventh and twelfth centuries which coincide with the emergence of the Middle Ages.

So far, not very many historians are aware that besides such well-known elements and patterns as feudalism, rationality or rule, three other real factors were predominant, concerning economy, society, public order and law, as well as the ideas and experiences of the upper and lower classes: poverty, labor and freedom (emancipation) — *paupertas, servicium, opus servile, libertas*. Nothing else, perhaps, makes it more clear and obvious how men, awakening from ancient and uniform rigidity, made rapid progress economically, socially, rationally and mentally in a period which I call the *Aufbruch* (the awakening or rising up) of Europe. Poverty, labor and liberty were also the background of the literary and humanist movements of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, as much in the written and spoken word as in actual life experience. If they were isolated, they did not manifest their dynamic combination and explosive power. I am aware of the decisive importance of rulership and elite groups because a major part of my research was concerned with them,[7] but an exclusive interest in them obscures another dynamic element of the historical process. The medieval period of *Aufbruch* towards a societal (not social) evolution was no less important and secular than that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which were shaped by the same elements of poverty, labor and emancipation. That this is true becomes evident if we analyze the preceding ancient period in which power, rulership, wealth (the power to dispose of land and compulsory service), order (*ordo*), uniformity, symbolism, the totality of thought and action, were outstanding and prevailing in society and civilization.[8] During the period of *Aufbruch*, labor, poverty and emancipation had become conscious and variously noted motivations and forces of the historical process and had acquired opposing aims and positions which prevailed in the long run through evolution and revolution.

Labor[9] was held in contempt in ancient society; it was an evil in human life. In educated and literary tradition, the Virgilian term *labor improbus* was often quoted and repeated. It was a misfortune and calamity that had to be born humbly and obediently; it was the duty of the serf, of the lower classes which were collectively known as the *familiae* — the *Gesinde*, the servants [10] owned and ruled by king, nobility and church. The basic structure of medieval society comprised more than 90% of the whole population.

The *Aufbruch* movements of the period started at this structural point and were accelerated by the high vertical and horizontal mobility common since the eleventh century. From the dissolution of this basic structure arose the new classes of medieval society, situated between the nobility on the one side and serfdom and slavery on the other.[11] From these stem the *ministeriales* who replaced the old aristocratic elites of dynastic families which disappeared through physical exhaustion. They administered government and politics since the time of the Swabian emperor Frederic Barbarossa.[12] From the same *familia* arose also the middle classes in the urban centers of Europe, as well as the masses of free peasants who, as "pioneers" in the borderlands of Europe between settled and empty territories tilled new soil as homeland, an economic and political area for a new and increasing population. All of Europe, all the people were on the move at this time; economy, rulership, church, religion changed as fundamentally as never before or afterwards. It was generally an evolutionary dynamic.

The rise of the bourgeoisie and urbanism coincided with the liberation of labor and property in the towns and rural areas.[13] In the nineteenth century too, we may observe, the liberation of labor was the precondition of the democratic social process. During the so called High Middle Ages[14] the liberation of servile compulsory labor meant and caused emancipation of the working man from the compulsory service of *familia* and the free disposition of the power and profit of his labor. This initiated important changes and progress in the economy and society. The model of the large city of Regensburg in Southern Germany during the High Middle Ages proves that this was only the first step in the evolution of civic liberty, for the inhabitants of the towns did not achieve personal freedom through abolition of matrimonial compulsion and limitation of moving property to the *familia* of the lord until the end of the twelfth century. From then on they could marry outside the *familia* of the lord of the town and sell land and goods to anybody. That was the second step of liberation of the *familia* of their lord, or the lord of the town or manor. The servile ancestors of the townsmen, merchants, artisans, craftsmen and peasants bought themselves off *opus servile* (servile labor), a compulsory service for their lord, by a certain sum of money. The lord then transferred them to the holy patron of a church who thus became their fictitious lord to whose church or monastery they had to pay an annual tax. The graduation of this *census annualis* expressed the new gradation of society and social status according to which the taxpayer was a *ministerialis*, *civis* (citizen) or *servus operarius* (laborer). The *ministeriales* of this classification represented the oldest urban elite, a so called patrician circle of activities — the first "newcomers" before the arrival of the long-distance merchants and bankers. Merchants, artisans and laborers settled in the suburbs (*suburbia*, *portus*) of the old Roman cities of France, Italy and Germany, and after a longer or shorter interval were

admitted into the expanded city walls. They were then integrated with the inhabitants of the old town nucleus to form a new urban community.

After liberation from service, work in cities and towns developed into autonomous occupations of trade and artisanship based on personal risk and venture. The workers, producers and traders accumulated money and expanded their businesses. As early as the thirteenth century an early form of capitalism developed though not in Weber's meaning of the term. Men worked for profit, calculated the chances and risks of their business and began to plan. None of that happened during the ancient period, but this is Weber's "rational trend" which became constitutive for European society and civilization. The beginning of this trend coincides with the rise (*Aufbruch*) of the eleventh century. This liberation and emancipation of labor-power resulted in constant expansion of production, increasing commercial activities by merchant and artisan communities throughout Europe, in expansion of interests, of the geographical and mental horizon of Europeans, in growing social prestige of the middle classes and in a new social morality. There were ample motivations for individual and collective initiatives; new geographical and material opportunities for expansive activities opened up; new ways of doing old things were sought in foreign countries. Europeans who are proud of their own urbanism should not forget that it is only due to lack of research and of cooperation between the different disciplines of medievalists that we do not know enough about the first continuous and civilized post-Roman urbanism in Islamic Asia Minor and Spain prior to that of Europe. We should also remember that between the ninth and eleventh centuries it was Islam and not Christianity which was the real global civilization, and that Arabic was the language of scholarship, science and literature prior to Latin.

The church and the clerics who held the intellectual monopoly in Europe until the twelfth century, always had a special feeling for changes in society; they were now convinced that new men needed a new *cura animarum* (pastoral care) if the church was not to risk the loss of control over the *fideles*, the faithful. The best proof of this is the creation of new reformed orders from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries such as the monks of Hirsau, the Cistercians or the Mendicants, all of whom made labor and service a new religious and ethnical ideal. My own studies[15] have shown that the regular Canons, especially the Augustinian Canons as instruments of a second post-Gregorian papal and curial reform in the twelfth century, created a new curacy all over Europe to serve, in closest cooperation with reforming bishops, the itinerant people and restless masses of the new urban and rural society. A fundamental change took place from the self-sanctification of the older monasticism to the principle of *caritas* in the sense of active love and help for all according to St. Augustin.

That the old nobility submitted to the new ideal of work was a telling

testimony to this effective change. Another consequence of the change in the church's attitude was the desire of the old ruling class whose economy and power had been based on its control of land and servile labor to benefit from the increasing wealth of the middle class because the former possessed no coined money. Hence it granted privileges to towns and burghers and honored labor at least as a spiritual, religious idea. The old monastic orders introduced the institution of lay-brothers which recruited even men of the highest nobility. The differences and contrasts between the ancient ideal concepts, the values of the nobility[16] and the new world of labor were not dissolved or abolished but resulted in an idealistic and religious compromise. The Cistercians highly appreciated the new idea of labor and organized new economic measures. They collected money and became known as the bankers of the twelfth century. A concentrated, more rational and specialized organization of labor and the economy gained momentum. By their *cura animarum* the Augustinian Canons not only raised the spirit of the rising classes in cities and along the main European roads, but also educated and instructed the maturing intellectuals in university centers such as Paris and Bologna. They produced such great creative thinkers as Hugh of St. Victor (Paris) and such "modern" critics like Gerhoh of Reichersberg.[17] For more than half a century the Augustinian Canons exercised the same centralized pastoral function for the Roman church as did the Mendicants of the thirteenth century and the Jesuits of the sixteenth.

Paupertas (poverty) was the ideology of the rising and emancipated urban and rural middle classes and the slogan of their critical objections to church, rulership and high society.[18] Two important events of the eleventh century formed the background of the tendencies and developments during the twelfth century. As a result of the so called Investiture Contest, better referred to as the first Roman church reform, king and noblemen lost the sacred legitimacy of their rulership and were subordinated to the law and judgment of church and public. That meant secularizing and demythologizing and disecclesiasticalization of rulership. The secular ruler was compelled to find an autonomous divine legitimation outside the church, a model of which was provided by Anonymus of York. As a result of this secularization, individualism, humanism, and secular sanctity were rising and expanding through theocracy, feudal monarchy and the principle of feudal contract.[19] Another crucial point was the demand in the growing communes of Italy by the rising civic and laic classes, not primarily by the church, that priests should remain unmarried and should be forbidden to buy their clerical and spiritual offices, and that priests of the latter kind should have no right to give the eucharist legitimately. The Pataria in Northern Italy made such demands but that did not prevent the reforming popes from having dealings wih them. Berengar of Tour formulated the theological background. Hence I believe that the reform popes, especially

Gregory VII, did not insist on celibacy or forbid simony on their own initiative or under the influence of the reform movement of Cluny, but accepted the demands of the restless classes and citizens of the northern Italian towns and agreed with their spirituality in this respect.

The spiritual and mental awakening of the rising classes had two consequences. It became increasingly necessary to organize a new centralized pastorate because the restless masses and their leaders intensified their criticism of the rich and mighty reigning church and compelled the clerics to discuss their demands. The call for abolition of simony hit the reigning churches of bishops who were losing their city-lordships in Italy, and in Germany were compelled to choose between organizing a new pastorate, as they did during the first half of the twelfth century, and becoming estates of the empire and territorial princes according to the empire's feudal law and neglecting *cura animarum*, as they did since the end of the century. There were many bishops in Europe during the first half of the twelfth century, e.g., in Salzburg, Regensburg, Passau, Halberstadt, or Paris, who used the Augustinian canons for this necessary task and tried to apply the ideal of *caritas* to guiding the faithful. They also wanted to link labor as an individual way of self-sanctification and individual poverty to the collective wealth and power of their churches and monasteries. At the end of the century, however, this idea was no longer accepted by the highly restless, excited and unsatisfied masses. Hence other persons and organizations had to establish a "modern" pastorate. It was the Mendicants who felt an urge to abandon the outdated burden of the church's collective wealth, who preached pure and total poverty, and who were ready to practice it in order to bring back the masses who had already started to follow the heretics. The Mendicants and above all St. Francis convinced pious people of being true and total *pauperes Christi* (Christ's poor) because these men and women saw themselves as such.

This new "social religion" corresponded to the religion of the masses (*religion populaire*)[20] and conformed to the social changes of a highly unstable society and to the desire for social status by the new urban and rural classes. Already in the eleventh century during the early stage of the *Aufbruch*, the church and secular rulers in France and Germany reacted by proclaiming the ecclesiastic Peace of God and the German *Landfrieden* (public peace). They thus protected the peaceful work of burghers and peasants and gained their loyalty and military supplies. King and aristocracy founded cities and towns, especially the Swabian emperor Frederic I who had taken note of the efficiency and power of labor, production and money in the growing communes of Northern Italy.

It must be understood that in this period of high feudalism and aristocratic rule the ideological contempt of work and workers did not disappear for a long time. The peasants did not obtain personal freedom, yet by the

end of the eighteenth century they were the "poor people" which corresponds to the medieval Latin term *paupertas*. We can trace the development of the lower classes in Europe by means of the literary terms "the poor man," "the common man," "the little man." But the medieval sense of poverty was not the same as that of our modern era. The medieval sense, according to many cases found in the sources, becomes apparent by contrasting the words *potens* and *pauper*. The poor is not the man who lacks a minimum of livelihood, is not the outsider in a welfare society; he is the powerless, nonviolent and protected man. In times of feud and legitimate use of power, the poor, the worker, needed extensive protection because work can only be successful if performed in peace.

Why did the rising classes criticize the wealthy powers — the church and the secular rulers — since the eleventh century? In medieval thinking any "revolutionary" act can only mean reform and restoration of a previous situation. Imitation (of the old and tried values) is one way of progress, renewal, renaissance and reformation the others, for everything is embodied in a religious, eternal order (*ordo*). Retrospective thinking should not imply a violent social change. The reformers, too, were medieval in their thinking.

The critical objections were first expressed in the progressive cities of Italy, at Milan and in the Pataria movement; however, popes and emperors formed coalitions with them. In the middle of the twelfth century the Augustinian canon Arnold of Brescia, a student of Abelard, the famous Parisian teacher, turned the critical challenge into a revolution in Rome itself. It may seem strange to us that it was the urban laics, merchants and artisans, who demanded celibacy and drove out married clerics. The emancipative power of the new ideal of poverty became extremely effective in the movement of itinerant preachers in France, Italy and western and southern Germany who called themselves *pauperes Christi*. They wanted to restore the poverty of the original church, of the evangelists, of the apostles. Their ideals were the naked Christ on the naked wood of the cross and nakedly they followed the naked Christ. They also denied any secular power to the church. The main obstacle to understanding between the movement of poverty and the church was the leading position of the laics, the laic preachers and especially the women.[21] The movement of itinerant preachers caused the first emancipation of women in Europe. The Roman church brought this first church of the poor under its control but the second wave, since the middle of the twelfth century, was divided into the heretical groups of Cathari and Waldensians who left the church and were persecuted, and the orthodox poverty movement of the Mendicants who were clericalized and turned into an ecclasiastic order by Pope Innocent III, in the same way in which Innocent II had used the Augustinian canons. The Mendicants became militant priests, preachers and pastors of the urban and rural masses. Their activities postponed the reformation for 300 years.[22]

The poverty movement from the eleventh to the thirteenth century was a religious, a spiritual and a social phenomenon. It was born out of dissatisfaction with the social system of feudalism, with the feudal way of life of the ruling bishops and with the ancient mixture of worldly and transcendent elements. It was the expression of a desire for freedom and a preference for spirituality. Its consequence was a religious laicism inside and outside the church which corresponded to the first laic literature and the first secularization of rulership and society in the twelfth century. Other consequences were a new concept of Christianity and the individual Christian life, a new critique of life and of the doctrine of the church, a new morality of labor and far-reaching changes of society. At the end of the twelfth century the papacy and the new social classes which considered themselves nonviolent were at loggerheads. *Ecclesia spiritualis* of the poor of Christ stood up to the power of the church of priests. Heretical masses and clericalized Mendicants in the end represented the poor church of the spirit. Through liberation of labor the restless urban and rural classes were set free from the bonds of *familia*. Poverty became the ideology of the social critique of emancipated men and groups. Emancipation was the result of the great instability of this feudal society. The best proof of that was the emancipation of women and the acceptance of *ministeriales* by court society. But the outstanding evidence of this liberating, restless society was the *libertas ecclesiae* (liberty of church), the chief item of papal and ecclesiastic reform in the second half of the eleventh century. The reforming popes wanted to liberate themselves and their church from the bonds of a rulership that had been sanctified with the help of the high clerics of the Carolingian age and that had made the bishop of Rome an imperial bishop of the German king in the first half of the eleventh century. Thereby the popes tried to transform themselves into the universal power of Christianity face to face with the laic, decentralized and secularized emperor. By this act of emancipation the papacy succeeded for the first time in completing the universality of the Roman church throughout Europe and simultaneously in gaining spiritual and political hegemony over the continent.

Mutatis mutandis labor, poverty, liberation/emancipation were the most effective, decisive and predominant elements and factors of the social and historical process of modern and contemporary history as well as of the medieval period of *Aufbruch*. This observation may seem paradoxical and sensational and opposed to the ideas of historians and social scientists. However, not only the existence of the same notions in medieval sources with a comparable sense but also the possible and justified application of modern views and concepts make clear that the structural analysis combined with the history of ideas prove that Europe is a social and cultural unit. The impact of lower-class movements can be observed throughout the continent.

Notes

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