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THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF ABBO OF FLEURY

Theory and practice at the end of the tenth century*

Let us cast back our minds to 11 July 989, to the monastery of Fleury (Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire), upstream from Orléans. On this day, the feast of the translation of St Benedict, the abbey was visited by throngs of pilgrims from far and near who came to pay their respects to the founder of Western monasticism. The community of abbot, monks, oblates and schoolboys was augmented by secular and regular clergy from Francia and abroad, and by the usual visiting scholars, who were interested in the library and scriptorium of Fleury as well as in St Benedict. Secular pilgrims, aristocrats and ordinary freemen, could also be seen. The main attractions were, naturally, the two churches, one dedicated to St Peter, the other to the Virgin Mary¹. The abbey was rich: its possessions had been continually enhanced since the time of its foundation in the seventh century by gifts from kings and private individuals, and had received protection in royal and papal charters².

The abbot who was responsible for the proceedings on this day was Abbo, until recently the renowned schoolmaster of the school of Fleury, who had been newly appointed to the office³. His tasks with regard to the monastery's relations with the outside world were complex. The riches of the abbey, though decisively facilitating its spiritual and cultural development, posed its problems, and Abbo's lamentations, later, about the worries of the world which thrust themselves upon him in his

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1 On the architectural history of Fleury see Robert-Henri BAUTIER, *Le monastère et les églises de Fleury-sur-Loire sous les abbatiats d'Abbon, de Gauzlin et d'Arnaud (988-1032)*, in: *Mémoires de la Société nationale des Antiquaires de France*, 9th series, 4 (1968) p. 71-156.

2 Cf. M. MOSTERT, *Die Urkundenfälschungen Abbos von Fleury*, in: *Fälschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica München, 15.-18. September 1986*, 6 vols. (Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Band 33, I-VI) IV, *Diplomatische Fälschungen (II)*, Hannover 1988, p. 287-318.

3 Aimon tells us that Abbo ruled 16 years. As Abbo died on 13 November 1004, his rule must have begun in 988, probably in the last quarter, after a short period in which an unnamed abbot ruled. Cf. M. MOSTERT, *Le séjour d'Abbon de Fleury à Ramsey*, in: *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 144 (1986) p. 199-208.

function as abbot were no mere cliché⁴. Of course St Benedict could be relied upon to defend the church which he himself, in a technical sense, owned: the *Miracula Sancti Benedicti*⁵ were the written record of his continuous vigilance in this respect. But Abbo, though he could trust wholeheartedly in the saint's continuing benevolence, had to be vigilant as well. First, there was the bishop of Orléans, who claimed an almost vassalitic relation between himself as »senior« and the abbots of his diocese as vassals⁶. Next, there were the kings. The Carolingians had taken Fleury into their protection as long ago – at least – as the days of Louis the Pious, and when Hugues Capet took over from them, this state of affairs was quickly confirmed. But the protection of the kings was bought at the price of complete dependence on them, and they treated the monastery as their personal property, tending to forget their role of defender of the church. Abbo had inherited, with his office, a policy which aimed at reducing the parts played by the diocesan bishop and the king to a minimum. The weapons with which the newly appointed abbot could try to assist St Benedict in maintaining the delicate prosperity of Fleury had to be sought in the resources of the abbey itself; Abbo was to use especially the assistance of the intellectual élite of the scriptorium, the former pupils he himself had trained in his capacity of schoolmaster. Together with these collaborators he was to investigate the vast collections of the library to find theological and legal arguments with which to resist any attempts on his monastery.

This article deals with the political ideas of Abbo of Fleury. Something has to be said about the genesis of his »political« works in the meeting between the exigencies of his abbacy on the one hand and the authoritative experience collected in the library of his monastery on the other. His *Liber Apologeticus*⁷, the text which lately has received some attention because of Abbo's inclusion in it of what seems to some to be a »social theory«, may serve as an example of the texts in which Abbo expressed a part of his political ideas.

The political thought of the tenth century has left less traces than that of the preceding and succeeding centuries. Rich materials survive from the ninth-century Carolingian Renaissance: one only has to think of the conciliar decrees, the prince's mirrors, and the works of Hincmar of Reims. The literature produced by the eleventh-century reform movement, the investiture contest and the beginning of the reception of Roman law also provide ample sources for modern consideration. But even if the tenth century occupies a less important place in the history of ideas; there are still texts, the intensive study of which might prove fruitful for a better understanding of medieval political thought. Among these the writings of the

4 Abbo of Fleury, *Liber Apologeticus*, in: MIGNE, PL 139 col. 461B–472A, col. 461B. A new edition of Abbo's *Liber Apologeticus*, *Collectio Canonum and Epistolae*, together with an edition of Aimoin's *Vita Abbonis*, is being prepared under the direction of Robert-Henri BAUTIER. Quotations are after the new edition, which will appear before long.

5 *Miracula Sancti Benedicti*, ed. by Eugène DE CERTAIN, *Les miracles de Saint Benoît*, Paris 1858. Cf. Alexandre VIDIER, *L'historiographie à Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire et les Miracles de Saint Benoît*, Paris 1965.

6 See *infra*, p. 90 n. 20.

7 Cf. Marco MOSTERT, *The political theology of Abbo of Fleury. A study of the ideas about society and law of the tenth-century monastic reform movement*, *Hilversum* 1987 (*Middelieuwse Studies en Bronnen II*), p. 48–51.

protagonists of the tenth-century monastic reform movement have not as yet been exhaustively studied. The writings of Abbo, who was abbot of the influential monastery of Fleury from 988 to 1004, occupy an important place among them.

Born around the year 940 in the Orléanais, Abbo was pupil and oblate in Fleury, and also studied in Reims, Paris and Orléans⁸. His intellectual excellence in school and scriptorium led to his appointment as *armarius*, the head of the cultural institutions of the monastery⁹. He developed into a many-sided scholar, a rival of Gerbert of Reims, and wrote on computus, grammar, logic and dialectic. From 985 to 987 he stayed at Ramsey, in England, where he heard the story of king Edmund, the royal martyr who had died in 869 at the hands of the Viking army; back in Fleury he was to write the first hagiographical treatment of the king's death, the *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*¹⁰. In 988 he was elected to the abbacy of Fleury, and from that date until his death in 1004 he worked for the promotion of the ideas of the monastic reform movement both with regard to the relationship of the monastery with the outside world and with regard to the spiritual life within the monastery walls. It was his immediate purpose to secure the immunity of his own monastery from the exactions of the temporal and spiritual hierarchies. His embittered conflict with Arnulf, the bishop of Orléans, led him to seek the support of the new Capetian kings of France, Hugues and Robert II, and, slightly later, of the pope. As Fleury had been one of the last remaining Carolingian monasteries, the change of dynasty in 987, when Hugues Capet, the duke of France in whose territory the possessions of Fleury had formed an enclave, was elected king of the Franks, was viewed with concern¹¹. One of Hugues' main advisers had been the same Arnulf of Orléans with whom the monastery had had problems for some time. It was the complex relationship of the abbot of Fleury with the diocesan bishop, the kings and the pope, which necessitated Abbo to write several texts in which he dealt, amongst other things, with political matters. Three incidents with national repercussions in which he was involved, i. e. the deposition, in 991, of the treacherous Carolingian archbishop of Reims; the disruption of the council of St Denis in 944; and the proposed marriage of Robert II to his relative Berta in 996, helped to clarify his position. His *Liber Apologeticus*, written in the aftermath of the council of St Denis, and the *Collectio Canonum*¹², written between 994 and 996, were addressed to the kings, and contained not only a defense of the monastic order, but also statements on the office of the king and the respect due to him. On the occasion of a successful mission to Italy in 996 Abbo entered into a friendship with the young pope Gregory V and proved able to obtain the promise of a grandiose charter of immunity on the basis of a forgery made in the scriptorium of Fleury. The charter, its context written by the destinatory, an

8 Cf. MOSTERT (see n. 7) chapters 2 and 3, p. 24–64.

9 On the office of the Fleury *armarius* at this time cf. Thierry of Amorbach, *Consuetudines Floriacenses Antiquiores* c. 9, ed. by Anselme DAVRIL and Lin DONNAT, in: *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* VII, 3, Siegburg 1984, p. 16–17.

10 Abbo of Fleury, *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*, ed. by Michael WINTERBOTTOM, in: *Three Lives of English Saints*, Toronto 1972, p. 67–87.

11 *Annales Floriacenses*, ed. by VIDIER (see n. 5) p. 219 and *Annales Floriacenses Breves*, ed. by Georg WAITZ, in: *MGH SS* 13, Hannover 1881, p. 88.

12 Abbo of Fleury, *Collectio Canonum*, in: MIGNE (see n. 4) col. 473A–508A.

»Empfängerausfertigung«, arrived validated and all, a year later¹³. Abbo's authority in Francia grew. Most of his *Letters*¹⁴, written when he was consulted on matters of immunity by other monasteries, postdate this journey. Abbo was killed during the inspection of the priory of La Réole (Gironde) in 1004, and has for this reason been venerated as a saint.

Especially his *Liber Apologeticus*, his *Collectio Canonum*, the twenty-odd letters which remain of his correspondence and the *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* are useful as sources for his political thought; I will henceforth refer to them as his »political works« for short, even if their »political« matter forms only a part of the whole of their contents.

It has been remarked that to talk of Abbo's political thought is a risky business, as the passages in which his ideas found written expression represent only fragments of his thought, and because Abbo never wrote down his political ideas in any one, single text. Yet I feel that his set of ideas about matters of state and society shows enough coherence to talk of a political theology. But we always have to remind ourselves that we are dealing with a reconstruction, as Abbo never felt compelled to write all of his ideas down in an ordered manner. His political works were written in answer to specific questions in which Abbo used only those arguments which he felt to be appropriate to the case at hand; his political theology is a reconstruction based on his political works.

Abbo's experience necessarily coloured his perception of political matters. When he felt compelled to write down a political work, he had at his disposal three kinds of experience. Each conserved, in its specific way, a part of the knowledge and skills he had acquired up to that moment. There was his personal experience, the experience of the Latin language, and the experience of the texts preserved in the Fleury library. It may be helpful to expand a little on these three types of experience.

First of all, there was Abbo's own, personal experience of the life of oblate, monk, scholar and abbot. The liturgy of mass and office, through its continually repeated prayers for the king, must have exerted its influence on his political thought¹⁵. The liturgy was, among other things, the moment when, through the recitation of the names of monks alive and dead, of benefactors and of others who had received the right of belonging to a monastery's prayer community, the relations of the monastery with the outside world were defined. Had any necrologies from before the fourteenth century survived, the relations of Fleury with the monarchy would doubtlessly have been illuminated. As it is, the liturgical connections can be ascertained from some of the other surviving liturgical books. The *benedictiones*, solemn blessings given over the congregation during mass, were copied in sacramentaries and, later on, the episcopal *benedictiones* were copied in a separate book, the benedictional. Several sacramentaries and benedictionals survive from Fleury from

13 Cf. MOSTERT (see n. 2).

14 Abbo of Fleury, *Epistolae*, in: MIGNE (see n. 4) col. 419C–462A and (for those letters incorporated by Aimoin in his *Vita Abbonis*) col. 397B–C and col. 399B–401A.

15 MS Orléans, BM 196 (173), second half of the ninth century, p. 136–140. Cf. Elisabeth PELLEGRIN, *Notes sur quelques manuscrits de sermons provenant de Fleury-sur-Loire*, in: *Bulletin d'information de l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes* 10 (1961) p. 10 and MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 28–29.

Abbo's days¹⁶. Their liturgical prayers for the king show the preoccupations of the tenth century: the king is instituted by God; the clergy appears to be especially interested in the virtues of the king; kingship is thought of as an office; the king's duty to protect the church is stressed.

The monastic ideals of the reform movement, which stressed the social differences between the life of the monks and that of the *seculum*, also influenced Abbo's thought. It had been under abbot Theodulf (798–819), one of the more important figures in the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, but especially in the tenth century, after the reform of the monastery by Odo of Cluny, that the influence of the monastery was to grow¹⁷. From the 940s onwards Fleury, though eclipsed in importance by Cluny, could strive for the same privileges as Cluny: independence from feudal entanglements, subordination to the papacy only. The monastery itself became active in the cause of reform, constituting an important centre of the monastic reform movement. In Francia, monasteries were reformed, prayer communities established and Fleury provided intellectual support. In the second half of the tenth century and especially under the rule of Abbo and his successor Gauzlinus, the effect of St Benedict's assistance in this respect was felt most strongly. Monasteries which had no library, or only an insufficient one, borrowed books from Fleury for copying. Scholars from Fleury were invited to elevate the intellectual level elsewhere¹⁸. Even from Germany, Spain, England and from the North of Italy monks desirous for the spiritual life came to learn its law in the monastery of St Benedict himself.

The prestige of St Benedict in western monasticism and the tradition of the struggle for exemption which Abbo inherited with his abbatial dignity determined the topics to which he was to address himself as abbot of Fleury. Relations with the monarchy were of vital importance. Fleury was under the jurisdiction (*potestas*) of the king, and the king could ask for provisions when it pleased him to visit Fleury, just like any lord who spent some time on his possessions. On occasion Fleury had even served as a prison; at other times, it had been a haven of refuge for someone seeking the king's protection¹⁹. Abbo had to perform court service and used these occasions to further the interests of his monastery. With respect to Hugues and

16 MS Orléans, BM 127 (105) (s.X; written in England; from Winchcombe); MS Paris, BN lat. 987 (given to Fleury by Ramsey; cf. André of Fleury, *Vita Gauzlini abbatis Floriacensis monasterii* c. 55, ed. by Robert-Henri BAUTIER and Gillette LABORY, Paris 1969 [Sources d'Histoire Médiévale publiées par l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes 2], p. 94); MS Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum Slg. Ludwig V 1, the sacramentary of Beauvais, maybe written at Fleury for the coronation of Robert II on 19. 6. 1017 at Compiègne (cf. A. VON EUW and J. M. PLOTZKE, *Die Handschriften der Sammlung Ludwig 1*, Cologne 1979, p. 219–222 and Pls. 137–141).

17 Cf. Lin DONNAT, *Recherches sur l'influence de Fleury au X^e siècle*, in: *Etudes ligériennes d'histoire et d'archéologie médiévales*, ed. by R. LOUIS, Paris 1975, p. 165–174.

18 Cf. the collected articles of Elisabeth PELLEGRIN, *Bibliothèques retrouvées. Manuscrits, bibliothèques et bibliophiles du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance*, Paris 1988, and M. MOSTERT, *The library of Fleury. A provisional list of manuscripts*, Hilversum 1989.

19 Cf. *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire 1*, ed. by Maurice PROU and Alexandre VIDIER, Paris 1907 (Documents publiés par la Société historique et archéologique du Gâtinais 5), Nos. 14, 22, 34, 55, 60, 64 and 69. Abbo of Fleury, *Collectio Canonum* (see n. 12) c. 18 and 20 col. 487A and 487B–C; Abbo of Fleury, *Epistolae* (see n. 14) 6, 11 and 14 col. 424C, col. 438B and col. 440C–D. See also MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 37–38.

Robert, Abbo faced the difficult task of reconciling his duties as vassal with the independence needed to be the vigorous abbot able to further monastic reform. His position was complicated by the attitude of Arnulf of Orléans: the nexus of the episcopate with the vassalitic system of hierarchical relationships between lords (kings or territorial princes) and vassals (bishops) led the bishops to attempt to extend their influence on the abbeys in their diocese by requiring an oath of »fealty« from their abbots on the model of the oath which their own lords had asked them at their investiture with the *episcopatus*. Arnulf succeeded in obtaining an oath from Letaldus of Micy, the neighbour of Fleury. When he approached Abbo with the same proposition, he met with resistance: Fleury claimed to be subject only to the pope in spiritual matters, and only to the king in secular matters²⁰. Personal antipathy between Abbo and Arnulf increased the hostility between the abbot and the bishop and a series of incidents ensued. When Abbo finally realized that the main hope of quiet for his abbey lay in the protection papal authority could provide, he developed into one of the few tenth-century partisans of papal primacy²¹.

The skills and abilities of the politician, finally, which Abbo developed during his abbatial career, can be gleaned both from his own works, and from his contemporaries' remarks on his activities²².

The second kind of experience of which Abbo had to make use, was the accumulated knowledge embodied in the very words of the Latin language. As pupil of the school of Fleury, later as its master, he had been in constant contact with classical, patristic and legal texts, thus adding the semantic heritage of centuries to his own personal experience²³. Much could be said about this subject. We have to confine ourselves to one class of texts, the expressiveness of which seems to be rather underestimated by historians.

The »reference works« of the earlier Middle Ages, though in the nature of things hardly the most interesting literary productions of the period, must have had an influence far beyond their intrinsic merits. They would direct the mind of the monk who consulted them on some subject, giving rise to some associations while precluding others. Hence a study of the reference works an author had access to may shed some light on the various meanings and connotations of a word with which he might be familiar. Apart from the illustrious seventh-century compilation of Isidore of Seville, commonly known as the *Etymologiae* (which Abbo quoted on occasion)²⁴, Abbo had at his disposal a number of glossaries, some of which in turn were used as

20 Recueil (see n. 19) No. 44; *Miracula Sancti Benedicti* II, c. 19 (see n. 5) p. 123–124.

21 Cf. MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 127–130 with reference to Abbo, *Collectio Canonum* (see n. 12) c. 5 col. 479A–B and *Epistolae* (see n. 14) 1 col. 419C, 3 col. 421C, 4 col. 422C and 5 col. 423D–424B.

22 Cf. MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 45–59.

23 Cf. the introduction to the edition of Abbo of Fleury, *Quaestiones Grammaticales* by Anita GUERREAU-JALABERT, Paris 1982, p. 9–30.

24 Abbo, *Collectio Canonum* (see n. 12) c. 9 col. 482B used Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX, 3, 1, 4 and 6. Abbo, *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* (see n. 10) c. 5 p. 72 may also use this text. The edition of Isidore by W. M. LINDSAY, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols., Oxford 1911, p. vii–xi mentions several MSS which can be connected to Fleury. MS Berne, Burgerbibliothek 101 (s. IX) e. g. probably belonged to Fleury.

sources for the colossal eighth-century *Liber Glossarum*²⁵, a veritable monastic encyclopaedia which included definitions taken from the *Etymologiae* of Isidore, from the Western Fathers of the Church, and from classical learning. Earlier encyclopaedias, such as that of Martianus Capella (dating from the beginning of the fifth century)²⁶, were used by Abbo as well.

It may be useful to give an example of the importance of this kind of work even for an unlikely subject as the political ideas of the earlier Middle Ages. In his first letter to Bernard, a former pupil of Fleury who had become abbot of Beaulieu, Abbo quoted the following example:

»A law says: if a male has entered the temple of Venus he will be brought to death. Some youngster, who passed by the temple of Venus, saw that inside his mother was about to be murdered, and having entered he saved her. He is accused of having broken the law. He defends himself by saying he has obeyed the law and that, when the laws are contradictory, if ignorance [of the laws] cannot be pleaded, under the circumstances the plea of [filial] piety will prevail«²⁷.

This idea, the concept that laws may be contradictory, exercised Abbo often: the example, which is referred to as »Roman law« must have struck Abbo as a very telling bit of casuistry, because he used the same example in his *Letter* on the oath as well²⁸. But where did he find it? The example does not come from Roman law but from the fifth book of Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae*. In a MS from Fleury, now in the Burgerbibliothek of Berne, this particular passage has been annotated in the margin with the words *leges contrariae*²⁹. I would not like to judge whether Abbo himself was responsible for the note, or whether a previous reader had annotated the manuscript, and Abbo's eye had fallen on it. All I want to say about it is, that it may prove fruitful to pay attention to the reference works an author had access to.

This example leads us to the third type of experience used by Abbo. This was the experience »deposited« in the texts kept in the library of Fleury. Fortunately, the MSS of Fleury are reasonably well preserved. The abbey was extremely rich in manuscripts: more than 1000 manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts can be identified as having once been written in the scriptorium, or to have been kept in the library of Fleury³⁰. Contained in this enormous number of manuscripts are approximately 6000 different texts, ranging from medical recipes or riddles filling up a few blank lines at the end of a quire to hefty tomes which are still insufficient to contain

25 Cf. G. GOET, *Der Liber Glossarum*, Leipzig 1891 (Abhandlungen der phil.-hist. Cl. der Königl. Sächsischen Ges. der Wiss. 13,2). MS Berne, Burgerbibliothek 16 (s. IX), containing the first half of the work, the letters A–E, comes from Fleury. The accompanying volume must have been lost.

26 The Fleury copy of Remi of Auxerre's commentary on this work is now MS Berne, Burgerbibliothek B 56. Cf. O. HOMBURGER, *Die illustrierten Handschriften der Burgerbibliothek Bern. Die vorkarolingischen und karolingischen Handschriften*, Berne 1962, p. 164.

27 Abbo, *Epistolae* (see n. 14) col. 400B, quoting Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae* V, 464, ed. by A. DICK and J. PRÉAUX, Stuttgart 1969.

28 Abbo, *Epistolae* (see n. 14) 10, col. 434D.

29 MS Berne, Burgerbibliothek B 56 f. 96r.

30 Cf. especially MOSTERT (see n. 18). The number of MSS is calculated on the basis of »items«, i. e. those manuscripts or parts of manuscripts which have always remained together since they were completed by a *scriptorium*. These items are not always identical with »codicological entities«.

the whole of some of the lengthier patristic works. Both the number of texts and the number of manuscripts which are thought to be connected in some way or another with the library of Fleury are highly exceptional; the period in which Abbo, as *armarius* and abbot, guarded this collection, was the most brilliant in the history of the library.

The school of Fleury provided the skills necessary to benefit from the library; the library provided the ideas and texts which could be chosen for meditation and elaboration; the productions of the scriptorium allow us to determine which ideas were chosen from among the vast stock of available texts and in which manner they were treated. The intellectual output of the abbey did not consist exclusively in the large number of copies of classical and patristic texts made, nor in the numerous hagiographical and historical works composed. The monastery's population can be shown to have conformed to an intellectual hierarchy, at the feet of which sat the pupils in the monastic school, looking up at their masters, members of the intellectual élite which culminated in the office of the *armarius*. The intellectual activities which were proper to the various levels within this hierarchy left traces in the surviving manuscripts. In ascending order, these activities were:

- reception of instruction in reading and writing;
- private reading;
- the making of marginal notes while reading;
- the making of excerpts;
- the composition of collections of excerpts either for private use or for »publication«;
- and, finally, the writing of original works.

Not all monks could aspire to the culture of the intellectual élite of the scriptorium, let alone the composition of original works. The *probationes pennae*, the notes made by a scribe in an old codex apparently to check his pen's condition, possibly have to be interpreted as trying his writing in the two senses of: »formation of letters«, and: »composing a text«³¹.

The notes made in the margins of the surviving manuscripts quite clearly show the subjects in which succeeding generations of monks were interested. The gradual decrease in marginal notes of a »political« nature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries seems to point to a change in mentality which, though sufficiently explained by the decrease in political influence of Fleury, nevertheless also seems to have some connection with the shift of monastic intellectual excellence to Paris and St Denis³².

As for Abbo, Aimoin tells us, in chapter 7 of his *Vita Abbonis* (written just after Abbo's death), that Abbo made a collection of excerpts:

»having taken, like the very prudent bee which makes honey out of many flowers, sentences out of the authorities of many Fathers, he gathered a honey-sweet work. This, however, cannot at present be found, partly through the negligence of our own monks, partly because it

31 Cf. D. ESENDER, *Des notations musicales dans les manuscrits non liturgiques antérieurs au XII^e siècle*, in: *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 129 (1971) (sommaire).

32 Cf. M. MOSTERT, *La bibliothèque de Fleury (Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire)*, in: Hugues Capet 987–1987. La France de l'An Mil (in press).

has been pilfered by outsiders. But it is certain that he made these excerpts in order to have [legal] defenses against the bishop of Orléans, who made some unjust demands on him³³.

That the dossier, despite its usefulness, had been already lost a few years after Abbo's death does not need to astonish us: in the manuscripts surviving from Fleury a number of »dossiers« can be indicated, consisting, as Abbo's did, of excerpts from the Fathers, councils etc. They were sometimes added onto fly-leaves, or on pages left blank in a manuscript which had been finished long before. Hence Abbo's dossier, unless a clean copy had been made at some stage, could easily follow the same road to oblivion as did the other Fleury dossiers³⁴.

Abbo himself augmented the dossier from time to time. As most of his political works can be dated, one may try to arrive at some conclusions about the development of his dossier by correlating the relative chronology of Abbo's works with the corpus of his quotations³⁵. When Abbo was confronted with a situation in which he thought a written text was called for, he could take excerpts, arguments, from his dossier. If an argumentation could not as yet be bolstered by the quotation of an appropriate excerpt, Abbo, the former *armarius*, could quite possibly rely on the help of his pupils and collaborators in the scriptorium with the collection of additional material. The harvest of this exercise was then added to the dossier, for future use.

Abbo regarded texts as authorities, and his works more often than not consist of carefully chosen excerpts from earlier authors, who are usually quoted faithfully. The arguments used by Abbo to further the cause of monastic reform came from texts. As pupil, schoolmaster and *armarius*, Abbo had been in contact with texts; the intellectual institutions of the monastery, the school, the scriptorium and the library, had formed his ideas.

Abbo wrote his political works actively interrogating the accumulated experience of his personal career, the Latin language and the texts present in his library. But even if the wording of his works is borrowed, the juxtaposition of the fragments chosen for incorporation gave a meaning to these fragments which their original authors could, in some cases, hardly have dreamt of. This new meaning derived from their new context, from the new structure imposed on them by the tenth-century abbot who made the borrowed fragments into his own, tenth-century text.

Let us now look at an example of his political works, the well-known *Liber Apologeticus*, and see how Abbo's intellectual and political skills combined to compose, with the help of his dossier, a new work when faced with a specific complaint made by his bishop to the kings.

In February 994, just before Lent, a council was held at St Denis³⁶. The council

33 Aimoin of Fleury, *Vita Abbonis* in: MIGNE (see n. 4) c. 7 col. 394A.

34 Cf. e. g. MSS Berne, Burgerbibliothek 442, 451 etc.

35 MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 70–71.

36 The main source is Aimoin, *Vita Abbonis* (see n. 33) c. 9 col. 396B–D, with additional information from Gerbert, *Epistolae*, ed. by F. WEIGLE, *Die Briefsammlung Gerberts von Reims*, Berlin 1966 (MGH, *Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit* 2), No. 209 p. 251. On the year, which is in doubt, cf. Mathilde UHLIRZ, *Die zweite Sendung Abbos von Fleury zu dem Papst und die Wiedereinsetzung Arnulfs als Erzbischof von Reims*, in: *Jahrbücher des deutschen Reiches unter Otto II. und Otto III.*: Zweiter Band: Otto III., 983–1002, Berlin 1954, p. 181. The precision »before Lent« can be made

was a disaster: though the bishops »should have talked«, according to Aimoin, »about the correction of the wicked habits of themselves and their subjects, they ... devoted all their talking to the tithe of the churches, which they wanted to take away from laymen and the God-serving monks«³⁷. Bishop Arnulf of Orléans and Abbo found themselves on opposite sides, and Abbo felt obliged to defend the monks against the pretensions of the bishops³⁸. The place of the council was badly chosen, as the local populace depended on the alms given by the monks of St Denis, alms which were paid for by tithe. When the subject of the deliberations of the prelates transpired, a riot broke out and the bishops fled in disorder. To quote Aimoin again, our most important source on the matter: »among them Seguinus, the archbishop of Sens, who, usurping the primacy of Gaul in that synod, was also the first to flee«³⁹ ... and to get hurt. One of the bishops was so afraid, that he left behind a vast meal (apparently to fortify himself for the coming period of Lent) and fled as far as the walls of Paris. The bishops were furious. Abbo, known to the episcopate ever since his stand in favour of the treacherous archbishop, Arnulf of Reims, at the council of St Basle three years previous, was seen as the instigator of the disorder. He was excommunicated together with the monks of St Denis by the archbishop of Reims, Gerbert⁴⁰.

Abbo felt he ought to present his case to the kings, and wrote a *Liber Apologeticus* which he sent to Hugues and Robert, accompanied by a letter addressed to Robert only. The letter calls the text a *sermo apologeticus*⁴¹, which may indicate that Abbo pronounced it in the king's court, shortly after the disrupted council, probably at Easter.

In composing this text the dossier was made use of: there are express patristic quotations, and the *Registrum* of Gregory the Great, a favourite source of Abbo's⁴², apparently had already been excerpted by him a first time when he wrote the *Liber Apologeticus*. The councils of Antiquity, finally, were also quoted. These texts, we may presume, were read up by Abbo to form part of the dossier. Evidently there were also quotations from the Bible and from classical authors, texts with which Abbo was thoroughly familiar. These last quotations, however, were usually quoted without a reference to their source; their authority was either not subject to dispute, or they were reminiscences, conscious or unconscious recollection of phrases heard or read in the past⁴³.

The *Liber Apologeticus* consists of two parts. First, Abbo puts into writing his

considering 1. the information in Aimoin on the large meal taken by the bishops when the rioting broke out, and 2. the fact that the king's court assembled at Easter (1 April), on which occasion Gerbert was ticked off for excommunicating the rioters. See below.

37 Aimoin (see n. 33) c. 9 col. 396C.

38 Though Aimoin does not enlighten us on his arguments, we can form an idea by considering Abbo, *Collectio Canonum* (see n. 12) c. 52 col. 506C, *Liber Apologeticus* and Excerpt of the *Liber Pontificalis*, in: MIGNE (see n. 4) col. 535A–570C, c. 60 col. 549D on pope Silverius, *corruptus pecunia*.

39 Aimoin (see n. 33) c. 9 col. 396C.

40 Gerbert, *Epistolae* (see n. 36) No. 100, p. 129–130.

41 Abbo, *Epistolae* (see n. 14) 6 col. 425A.

42 MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 71–75.

43 Cf. the new edition of Abbo's works which is at present being prepared (see n. 4) for a survey of all sources used by Abbo.

well-known image of the tripartite society, and the view that only God can »own« the church. The accusations made by Arnulf, a member of the secular clergy, about Abbo, a representative of the regular clergy, could only be understood when it had been made clear what the exact relationship between these parts of the clergy was, and when the clergy had been given its proper place next to the »farmers« and »warriors« in God' social order. Only after these preliminaries did Abbo answer the four main accusations of Arnulf. The style is acrimonious, reminding one of the personal allegations in the *Apologia adversus libros Rufini*, written 401/402 by St Jerome, which Abbo may have read⁴⁴.

For our purpose we may confine ourselves to the first part of the text, which can be summarized as follows:

Abbo starts by saying that more than anything he would like to return to the »laborious leisure of spiritual philosophy«, but, alas, he has to concern himself with the »cares of the world«⁴⁵. He is accused because of his concern for the monks and the interest of the state. Now, not even the king's majesty would be able to save him from his opponents, when they would deem the time and place right. Therefore Abbo submits himself to the canonical judgment of the bishops⁴⁶. He pleads not to be a heretic. Rather, like the emperor Marcianus at the council of Chalcedon, so should Hugues and Robert combat heresy in their realm⁴⁷.

Follows the description of the tripartite society⁴⁸, in which the secular and the regular clergy relate to each other as Martha and Mary, because the members of the secular clergy »labour in the active life, having taken upon themselves the daily care of all churches with Martha, encumbered with many things«⁴⁹, whereas the monks, »with Mary«, are »foreign to the doings of the world, renouncing their own free will, following the orders of their spiritual father. They live both from the alms of good men and by the labour of their own hands«⁵⁰.

There is one single church, under Peter, the *princeps apostolorum*. But Jesus had said:

»Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church«. »My«, he says, not »your«. And elsewhere Christ says: »my house shall be called a house of prayer«. The Psalmist: »holiness becometh thine house, »O Lord«. When the church, then, does not belong to Peter, to whom does it belong? Or will the successors of Peter dare to vindicate a power for themselves which Peter, the prince of the church, did not possess? Surely, beloved princes, we cannot live, we cannot talk conform to catholic doctrine when I call this church mine, he that one his, and when, like some beasts of burden paired to senseless beasts of burden, we put both up for sale sometimes, and are not in the least afraid to buy from others [churches] on the market«⁵¹.

44 A Fleury copy of this text, now MS Orléans, BM 153 (130), has been annotated in the tenth century.

These notes indicate a gamut of abuse.

45 Abbo, Liber Apologeticus (see n. 4) col. 461B.

46 Ibid. col. 461C–462B.

47 Ibid. col. 462B–463B.

48 Ibid. col. 463B–465C.

49 Ibid. col. 464C.

50 Ibid. col. 464D.

51 Ibid. col. 465D, quoting Mt 16, 18, Mt 21, 13 and Ps 92,5 (iuxta LXX).

Everything in the church is bought and sold, laymen sell bishoprics, the bishops and priests recoup their expenses by charging for the sacraments⁵². When the bishops thus corrupt the *mores* of their subjects, the defenders of the church have to withdraw from their communion, lest they partake of the bishops' damnation. »Most pious kings, give your support, according to the custom of your predecessors, to those councils [i. e. those councils to which the Roman emperors had given their fiat] by which the commonwealth can ameliorate and grow through reconciliation«⁵³. If any injustice is left, this reflects badly on the kings »who occupy the apex of the realm for this purpose, that they give just judgment to all«⁵⁴.

Only after this first part, the accusations are answered. This is indeed a speech remarkable for its rhetorical fireworks. Abbo uses – as always – texts of the Fathers to bolster his case; in the *Liber Apologeticus* they are blended with his own words into a formidable argument in which the accusations of the bishops are not only refuted, but the defendant violently and victoriously turns the tables on the prosecution.

The example of the *Liber Apologeticus* shows how Abbo responded with its writing to a definite, specific question. If we are interested in Abbo's political ideas it is imperative that we never lose sight of this close connection between his thought and the reality which gave rise to its expression. And in this same way we ought to beware of disconnecting the political ideas in Abbo's »political« works from the other contents of those works. The treatment in recent years of the passage dealing with the tripartite society is a case in point.

Let us look more closely at that part of the *Liber Apologeticus* in which Abbo talks about the three orders⁵⁵. In the church, in both sexes, there are three orders in ascending degree of excellence:

1. the good order of the married;
2. the better order of the continent or widows;
3. the best order of virgins or nuns.

Men can also be divided in an order of laymen, an order of clerics and an order of monks. These two moral hierarchies are then further explored. Abbo talks in succession about the married state, about those who live in continence and widows, and on virgins and nuns. Next, he talks about the orders of men. The order of laymen can be subdivided into *agricolae* and *agonistae*. The order of clerics can be subdivided into deacons, priests and bishops; these three groups may be likened to Martha. The order of monks, finally, may be likened to Mary. The section closes with further observations establishing the characteristics of the three male orders, and their relative excellence.

The first intimation noted until recently of an idea which was eventually to lead to the theory of the »three orders« occurs in the translation of Boethius' *De Consola-*

52 Ibid. col. 466–467.

53 Ibid. col. 467D–468A.

54 Ibid. col. 468A.

55 Cf. MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 88–89.

tione Philosophiae by king Alfred of Wessex (d. 899)⁵⁶. A century later, according to Duby, there was a fundamental change in social ideas: in the period 990–1040 an image of the organization of society in the three estates developed, the *ordines* of those who prayed, those who fought and those who laboured. This functional tripartite system, which may be thought to imprint the whole of Indo-European culture, had been obfuscated since the days of Rome and had not played a significant role in the intellectual development of Western Europe. Apparently the tripartite theory could reappear through the conflation of several systems which had been bequeathed to the eleventh century by Carolingian thought⁵⁷.

However, even before the eleventh century, and even before the ninth, there were prefigurations of the idea in Francia: the *Sermo de Dignitate Sacerdotali*, ascribed by most of the manuscripts to St Ambrose, e. g., foreshadows the tripartite society. It may be a sermon of Ambrose reworked at an uncertain date into a »bishop's mirror«⁵⁸. Abbo knew the text and quoted it in the *Liber Apologeticus*⁵⁹. The *Sermo* knows three degrees of men:

1. the bishops (called: *sacerdotes*), deriving their right from St Peter;
2. the king and princes;
3. the multitude of the people.

According to G. H. Williams, in an article which appeared as long ago as 1957 and has since been forgotten, »a tripartite Christian society is only adumbrated here, but it is worth mentioning. Of special interest is the sense of tremendous spiritual distance separating Christian *sacerdotes* from even the royal and princely faithful«⁶⁰: the priesthood is compared to gold, which signified the spiritual discernment of the Scriptures; lead, to which the other two groups are compared, signified the cupidity for worldly things.

Abbo may have taken some ideas from this text. He obviously did not quote the reference to the tripartite society itself, because he preferred his own system, in which the monks rather than the bishops occupy the first place. Another text with which Abbo was familiar, the *Liber Pontificalis*, also contained several »functional« terms to describe sections of society. Abbo retained these in his *Excerpt* of the *Liber Pontificalis*, for instance in chapter 83, where the text distinguished »the venerable clergy and people and the very felicitous army of the Roman state«⁶¹. Apparently the

56 In chapter 17, translated in: Dorothy WHITELOCK, *English Historical Documents* 1, second ed. London 1979, p. 919. Cf. also Simon KEYNES and Michael LAPIDGE, *Alfred the Great*, Harmondsworth 1983, p. 30–31.

57 Georges DUBY, *The origins of a system of social classification*, in: Georges DUBY, *The Chivalrous Society*, London 1972, p. 90–91. See also Georges DUBY, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme*, Paris 1978.

58 Ps.-Ambrose, *De dignitate sacerdotali*, ed. by MIGNE, PL 17, col. 567–580. Identical to: *Sermo de informatione episcoporum*, attributed to Gerbert of Reims, ed. by MIGNE, PL 139, col. 169–178.

59 Abbo, *Liber Apologeticus* (see n. 4) col. 466C–467A.

60 G. H. WILLIAMS, *The golden priesthood and the leaden state, a note on the influence of a work sometimes ascribed to St Ambrose: the Sermo de Dignitate Sacerdotali*, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 50 (1957) p. 45.

61 Abbo, *Excerpt* (see n. 38) cc. 83 col. 562C and 86 col. 564B–D.

observations on which the concept of the three orders was later to rest were not as novel as their expression.

The section in which Abbo talked about the laymen has received most attention from scholars. He talked about the laity as follows:

»of the first order of men, i. e. of laymen, it has to be said that some are farmers (*agricolae*), some warriors (*agonistae*). Now, the farmers sweat in agriculture and the various rustic arts, by which the multitude of the whole church is sustained; but the warriors, content with a soldier's pay, do not collide in the womb of their mother [church] but fight most sagaciously the adversaries of the holy church of God«⁶².

Of the critics of this passage I need to name only Carl Erdmann, Jacques Le Goff, Jean Batany, Georges Duby and Jean Flori⁶³. Each of these authors has added something to our understanding; none of them has, to my mind, treated it quite correctly.

There are several problems with the explanations offered so far. First of all, one ought to treat Abbo's sentence on the laymen in the widest possible context. Only when the use of the key words in this sentence is compared with the use Abbo makes of them elsewhere may the full meaning of it be grasped. Secondly, one has to beware of supposing too close a fit between Abbo's use of a word, and the reality with which that word seems to correspond at first sight. Thirdly, one has to be aware of the full range of possible sources for this sentence. Evidently one can easily be too hard on an author for having failed in one or another of these respects, as Abbo's thought was never not the express subject of any of the studies devoted to this passage.

Nevertheless, someone ought to have spotted that the choice of the word *agonistae* was almost certainly determined simply by a reminiscence of a simile in St Paul which was on Abbo's mind when he wrote. In the second Letter to Timothy St Paul writes: »Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ... Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier (*bonus miles*) of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth (*qui certat in agone*) entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be soldier. ... The husbandman that laboureth (*laborantem agricolam*) must be first partaker of the fruits«⁶⁴. The simile of the good Christian as soldier and the nearby simile in which the rewards of the Christian life are likened to the first fruits to be reaped by the farmer, suggested Abbo to subdivide the order of laymen into two functional groups. However, in view of the context it is certain that this functional division was far less important to Abbo than the moral message he wanted to convey.

This is made even clearer when we consider a second scriptural reminiscence in this same sentence: the collision of the warriors in the womb comes from Genesis 25 where it is told of Rebecca, who was pregnant with Esau and Jacob: »and the

62 Abbo, *Liber Apologeticus* (see n. 4) col. 464B.

63 Carl ERDMANN, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens*, Stuttgart 1935, p. 86–87. Jacques LE GOFF, *Note sur la société tripartite. Idéologie monarchique et nouveau économique dans la Chrétienté du IX^e au XII^e siècle*, in: Jacques LE GOFF, *Pour un autre moyen âge*, Paris 1977, p. 67–70. Jean BATANY, *Abbon de Fleury et les théories des structures sociales vers l'an mil*, in: *Etudes ligériennes d'histoire et d'archéologie médiévales*, ed. by R. LOUIS, Paris 1975, p. 9–18. DUBY (see n. 57). Jean FLORI, *L'idéologie du glaive*, Genève 1983, p. 127ff.

64 II Tim 2, 3–6.

children struggled together within her womb« (*conclidebantur in utero eius parvuli*)⁶⁵. When she asks God what this means, the answer is: »two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger«⁶⁶. This passage was commented on in medieval exegesis in a »moral« way. E. g. St Augustine, in a sermon entitled »On the conceiving of Rebecca« wrote«

»Rebecca has conceived bodily of St Isaac; but spiritually the Church conceived of Christ. Because just like the two children struggled together in Rebecca's womb, just so in the womb of the Church there are two peoples standing against one another. Because if there were only good people, or only bad people, there would be one people; however, in the church there are found both good and bad people; in the belly of, so to speak, the spiritual Rebecca, there are two peoples struggling, to wit the humble and the proud, the chaste and the adulterers, the sweet-tempered and the irascible, the friendly and hateful, the merciful and the lustful ...«⁶⁷.

The virtues of the Christians who make up one part of the *laici* are important. There is only a moral dimension at stake here.

If we would know no more about Abbo's social ideas, then it would be very rash to ascribe a social theory to Abbo merely on the basis of this passage. Surely that word ought to be reserved for something slightly more developed than one single sentence? Considering merely the evidence of the two biblical reminiscences, it seems quite possible that Abbo did not at all intend to say something about the functions of the two groups of laymen. He was concerned about the existence of one order of laymen; within this order, however, some were better, more capable than others to follow Christ's commands.

It is well to remember that the whole section dealing with the various moral hierarchies occupies about 120 lines in Migne's edition. The 8 (!) lines about the laymen have to be read in their context. The passage about laymen is virtually negligible compared to the extended treatment given to clerics and monks.

Did Abbo, an aristocratic abbot, consider the laity to be hierarchically ordered? He probably did. In the same chapter of Genesis which we have quoted before, Esau is called a hunter and farmer (*gnarus venandi et homo agricola*)⁶⁸. Agriculture, some commentators on the passage remarked, was a stain, a blemish, keeping those occupied in it in the fetters of earthbound life⁶⁹. Jacob on the other hand, the superior brother, could come to be considered in medieval exegesis as the image of the God-fearing man⁷⁰, analogous to the *miles Christianus*. There probably was a stratification in Abbo's mind, but with a nature quite different from that suggested by the recent commentators.

If we consider the whole of Abbo's works, we will find that Abbo did indeed think in terms of an aristocracy (from the *miles* – knight upwards) lording it over the mass of the peasant population⁷¹. When we have established that, over and above the

65 Gn 25, 22.

66 Gn 25, 23.

67 St Augustine, Sermo »De conceptu Rebeccae«, ed. by MIGNE, PL 39, col. 1758.

68 Gn 25, 27.

69 Cf. e. g. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Hiob* 5, c. 20, ed. by MIGNE, PL 75, col. 689D–690A.

70 Cf. e. g. Rhabanus Maurus, *Comment. in Genesim*, ed. by MIGNE, PL 107, col. 611.

71 MOSTERT (see n. 7) p. 104 ff.

incidental functional division of the laymen into two groups there is a strong possibility of some sort of hierarchy then – but only then – are we allowed to look for the possible relations between this short passage in the *Liber Apologeticus* and tenth-century reality.

The reconstruction of the political and social thought of early medieval authors like Abbo must be based on the study of all their »political« works, and must consider as fully as possible the practical exigencies of the authors' functions on the one hand, and the ideas and theories which were at their disposal on the other. Tenth-century political thought was practical; its expression was hoped to influence and convince its audience to take action in the particular matter at hand.