THE GELASIAN THEORY FROM A
COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE:
DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE *

La teoría Gelasiana desde la perspectiva
de la comunicación: desarrollo y decadencia

Sophia MENACHE**
University of Haifa

RESUMEN: El presente artículo analiza los principales enunciados de la teoría Gelasiana y su transmisión en la Edad Media. Se ha puesto un énfasis especial en los distintos canales de comunicación que sirvieron tanto a la curia papal como a sus adversarios para propagar su credo con respecto al balance ideal entre el regnum y el sacerdotium: la realeza y el prelado. Aunque la teoría Gelasiana tuvo una influencia limitada en el medioevo temprano, ambas partes del conflicto trataron de involucrar amplias audiencias hacia el siglo XIV. Esta tendencia alcanzó su culmen durante el reinado de Felipe el hermoso, en su conflicto con el Papa Bonifacio VIII.


ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the principal postulates of the Gelasian theory and its transmission throughout the Middle Ages. Special emphasis is laid on the several communication channels that were used by the papal curia and its adversaries to spread their respective creeds with regard to a suitable balance between regnum and sacerdotium. Though the Gelasian theory enjoyed but very limited scope in the Early Middle Ages, each of the conflicting sides appealed to broader audiences toward the fourteenth century, a trend

** Ph. D., Professor of Medieval History. Department of History, University of Haifa, Mt. Carmel- Haifa 31905, Israel. C.e.: menache@research.haifa.ac.il.

that reached its zenith during the reign of Philip the Fair, King of France, in his struggle with Pope Boniface VIII.


The relationship between the papacy and the secular powers in the Middle Ages has attracted the attention of historians for generations. Of the many facets of political history, however, the communication perspective remains, to a great extent, *terra incognita*. Besides a few works on the field\(^1\), much research has still to be done. Such a *lacuna* undoubtedly reflects the many methodological problems inherent in the research of communications in medieval society; the main impediment being the lack of relevant documentation as to the available communication channels and, no less important, the scope of the audience as well as the time gap between emission and reception. In a pioneering book written about twenty years ago\(^2\), I analyzed the most important channels of communication in the Middle Ages and their main promoters, among which the papal curia and the royal courts played a most important role. The present paper focuses on the message and the communication channels developed in medieval society by both the apostolic curia and its secular counterparts in order to spread their respective creeds with regard to the most suitable balance between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. From the rich thesaurus of available documentation, the so-called “Gelasian theory” –enunciated by pope Gelasius I in his letter to the Eastern Emperor Anastasius in 494– has been selected as case-study. This choice is amply justified because of the primordial role of the Gelasian theory in shaping the theoretical foundations of the many political crises that characterized medieval society and, consequently, its long-standing

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influence. Since the theoretical/ideological aspects of Gelasius’s premises have been profusely researched, our investigation concentrates on those postulates that left their mark on the development of medieval political ideology from the fifth century onwards and the means of their transmission.

Gelasius’s creed appears in the opening clause of his letter, when he claims that “this world is [principally] governed by two [orders], the sacred auctoritas of the priests and the royal potestas”. Gelasius held that for all that the sacerdotal aura made the ecclesiastical hierarchy of great consequence, it could not nullify the differentiation between king and priest. Indeed, just as the political leader was bound “to obey, not to rule over the religious order”, for in these matters he is under the jurisdiction of the clergy, so “the priests knowing that the power is given [to Caesar] by Providence, obey his laws in all that pertains to the public order”. Gelasius’s declarations herald a long series of papal attempts to undermine the fundamentals of the Byzantine monistic tradition, which empowered the emperor with both political and religious authority. Dividing the representation of God on

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earth between two realms, Gelasius further defined the sphere of action of each, which was prescribed by their respective objectives: the political rule being the sole prerogative of the emperor, the religious authority being the monopoly of the priest. Both orders, Church and Empire/Kingdom, existed in a state of parallelism in this world, yet they were directed toward different goals. The political leader is in charge of the public order while the priest is occupied with the salvation of souls. Each receives his authority directly from God, in accordance with St. Paul’s recognition of the divine source of political authority (Romans XIII: 1-2). Each order is, in principle, independent of the other, yet the division of labour between them is not absolute: the ruler, who receives the sacraments from the priest, depends on him in spiritual matters; the priest, for his part, depends on the ruler and obeys him in all issues pertaining to the public order.

Both Dvornik and Carlyle approached the Gelasian theory as resulting from the development of Christianity and the Church in Late Antiquity, which demanded cooperation between the two powers. The decline of the Western Roman Empire and ultimately the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 created an authority vacuum as well as a political challenge in the West, with which the Bishop of Rome had to deal and ultimately to confront. This perspective provides a suitable answer to the inevitable question, How was the Gelasian theory, though formulated within a pre-feudal framework, so suitable to feudal Europe? Approaching the Gelasian theory as a response to the series of political upheavals that occurred simultaneously with the decline and eventually the fall of the Western Roman Empire provided a convincing explanation of its persistence. The survival of the emergent German states depended to some degree upon the cooperation to which Gelasius aspired. It was a rather utopian cooperation among strong, long-standing rulers, be they emperors or popes; yet it was possible, even desirable, between the popes—scions of the Roman heritage but deprived of political support—and the German kings, who were backed by military power but who lacked ideological and dynastical legitimacy. The ambiguity of Gelasius’s terminology and the absence of a clear dividing line between king and priest harmonized with the political situation of the Early Middle Ages, when both popes and kings could rely on Gelasius for irrefutable proof of their otherwise contradictory points of view. The ideological

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spectrum covered by Gelasius’s letter, furthermore, bridged biblical traditions, that of Republican Rome and that of the Church Fathers, all of them integral components of the Carolingian Empire. As to the development of the Church, as Walter Ullmann pointed out long ago, Gelasius’s rulings constituted the Magna Carta of the medieval papacy\(^9\); indeed, they provided the ecclesiastical establishment in general and the papacy in particular with ideological legitimacy and a wide field for political manoeuvring.

From a communications perspective, the question still stands, To what degree did the Gelasian theory permeate medieval thought and through what channels? One should note in this regard the complete lack of reference to Gelasius’s postulates for the three-hundred years that followed the papal declarations. The silence of the sources hints at the weight of the historical/political milieu in shaping the spread and influence of the Gelasian theory: the relative weakness of both the papacy and the emerging German monarchies between the sixth and eighth centuries relegated the relationship between king and pope to a marginal position. No wonder, therefore, that the whole matter received full attention with the emergence of the Carolingian Empire, with a novus David and “thirteenth apostle” threatening the status and role of the Bishop of Rome. Notwithstanding the papal initiative of the Renovatio Imperii, Charlemagne’s strong position and prestige actually avoided any real confrontation between the new emperor of the West and the Bishop of Rome. The new state of affairs was clearly reflected in the letter that Charlemagne sent to the elected pope, Leo III, in 795, in which the king declared: “It is our duty, with God’s help and mercy, to defend the Church of Jesus Christ everywhere, from without against the attack of the pagans and the destruction of heretics; from within, to strengthen recognition and acknowledgment of the Christian Faith. You, most Holy Father, are expected to raise your hands towards heaven, as Moses did, and to help through your prayer to [bring about] the victory of our armies”\(^10\). The conclusion is rather clear: five years before the imperial coronation, the King of the Franks broke the balance inherent in the Gelasian theory. By seeing himself responsible not only for the political/military development of his kingdom but for the defence of the Church and the Christian Faith, as well, Charlemagne thus inherited the Byzantine political tenets and left to the pope the rather theoretical function of asking for God’s mercy. However, the

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\(^{9}\) ULLMANN, W., *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, London, Methuen, 1972, p. 33.

relationship between regnum and sacerdotium did call for new approaches during the tempestuous reign of Charlemagne’s heir, Louis the Pious11.

Gelasius’s pronouncements served as a source of legitimacy for the Carolingian clergy at a time when it was striving to redefine relations between the emperor and the ecclesiastical elite. In a letter to Louis the Pious, the bishops of the realm stressed the desirability of separating the two orders of Christendom12. Shortly afterwards, Jonas d’Orléans, too, cited Gelasius to assure the desired coordination between Church and State, both being organs of the Christian society headed by the Christ. Although Gelasius recognized the superiority of the clergy at the sacramental level, Jonas went one stage further in concluding that this spiritual superiority endowed the clergy with both the right and even the duty to supervise all activities of the political leader13. Hincmar of Rheims, too, who also relied on Gelasius, asserted the superiority of priests, the anointing ceremony proving clerical supremacy over the anointed king or emperor14. Gelasius’s postulates were further used by Servatus Lupus, abbot of Ferrières, to legitimize his demand that the political leader become the executive arm of the Church’s commands15.

The foregoing examples hint at the distortion of the political balance inherent in the Gelasian theory as a result of the decline of political authority during the

reign of Louis the Pious thus reflecting again the close interaction between theory and political developments. From a communications perspective, it is important to note the main channel used by ecclesiastical spokesmen in the Early Middle Ages, be they members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy or the pope himself: namely, letters. By their very essence, letters did not enjoy a wide audience but focused on a narrow circle: the main recipient and his close advisors. Still, letters enjoyed a unique and most prestigious status in the framework of Early Christianity and beyond, and left their mark on the development of the Catholic Church. One should note in this regard the persistent influence of the New Testament Epistles, which were canonized as part of the Christian liturgy around 150 AD, and provided a communication channel between the average believer and his Father in heaven. The Gelasian theory itself –based as it was on the pope’s letter to the Eastern emperor– hints at the receptiveness of the ecclesiastical elite to papal correspondence. Unfortunately, most of our sources focus on later periods, especially from the eleventh century onwards, when it is relatively easier to follow more closely the development of papal correspondence, its audience, and no less important the scope and schedule of its transmission. The lack of further documentation leads one to conclude that the ecclesiastical message in the Early Middle Ages essentially appealed to the Church elite, not only because of its content but also because of its communication channels.

16 Though some research in recent years has been carried out on correspondence in the Early Middle Ages, much of it focuses on matters of style and content, and less on the channels of communication, their scope, and transmission procedures. See, for example, Rubenson, S., «Arguments and Authority in Early Monastic Correspondence», in Camplani, A., Filorano, G. (eds.), Foundations of Power: Conflicts of Authority in Late-Antique Monasticism, Leuven, Peeters, 2007, pp. 75-85. See, also, Constable, G., Letters and Letter-Collections, in Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental (17), Turnhout, Brepols, 1976.


19 One should note in this regard the growing gap in fluent communication of the kind and scope that characterized Late Antiquity. On the extent and function of letters in the administration and socio-cultural life of the Late Roman Empire, see, Horvath, A. T., «Some Aspects of the Roman Empire’s
True, the relationship between pope and emperor, or even in more general terms between Church and State, was indeed a matter of controversy within clearly defined socio-political circles, those that pertained to the upper classes by birth and occupation. Still, the very existence of the Church and, ultimately, the formation and evolution of a societas Christiana –namely, a society whose ideals and norms of conduct were dictated by the Christian faith and which was consequently ruled by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the pope at its head– were dependent on, if not the result of, the Church’s success in spreading its message among larger audiences. In particular, the Christian mission and the much-expected Christianisation of the German populations depended on the acceptance of the apostolic message by large areas of Europe. Such state of affairs further required a fluent dialogue between the papal curia and its legates be they monks or members of the secular clergy\textsuperscript{20}. The conclusion is rather clear: communication channels were the product of and reflect the socio-economic and political arena from which they emerged and to which they in turn appealed. The isolation characteristic of the Early Middle Ages thus left its mark on both the channels of communication and the rather narrow audience of the ecclesiastical message\textsuperscript{21}.

The eleventh century, which saw more active participation of different authors from outside the ecclesiastical order, provides in this regard a clear demarcation line in the evolution of the Gelasian theory and its diffusion in contemporary society. Of the many permutations of the period –first and foremost demographic growth and economic expansion\textsuperscript{22}– one should mention the growing weight of Roman law in


\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, the forms and purposes of Ambrose’s letter writing in the second half of the fourth century, as well as its impact on contemporary scholars, including St. Augustine of Hippo, in \textsc{Liebeschuetz, J. H. W. G.}, \textit{«The Collected Letters of Ambrose of Milan Correspondence with Contemporaries and with the Future»}, in \textsc{Ellis, L., Kidner, F. L.} (eds.), \textit{Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane}, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 95-107.

\textsuperscript{22} Any attempt to cover the topic would be rather unfeasible. Of the rich bibliography on the subject, see, \textsc{Fossier, R.}, \textit{«The Rural Economy and Demographic Growth»}, in \textsc{Luscombe, D., Riley Smith, J.} (eds.), \textit{The New Cambridge Medieval History}, c. 1024-c. 1198, Cambridge, Cambridge
the emerging universities, most especially in the framework of faculties of law devoted to the study of *utriusque iuris*. The struggle between emperors and popes in the context of the Investiture Contests further strengthened reliance on the Gelasian theory to clarify the otherwise unstable relations between the two main orders in Christendom. Yet, the use of the two-sword symbol played a major role in widening the rift between Church and State and actually weakened, if not annulled, the principle of cooperation and harmony that lay at the heart of the Gelasian theory.

Gottschalk of Aachen (1076) had tried to substantiate the Gelasian principle of the division of power by using the evangelical symbol of two swords (*Luke* XXII: 38) as a suitable allegory of the division of tasks between king and priest: the task of the royal sword being to fight the enemies of Christ but also to impose discipline on the clergy; the prelates’ sword being consequently limited to instil the faithful with obedience to the commands of the political leader, the anointed king. According to Gottschalk, once this rather biased division of labour was accomplished, the renewed cooperation and harmony between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* would bring about the fulfilment of God’s will as established in the Gospels (*Matthew* XXII: 21). The two-sword metaphor became thereafter the emblem of the imperial camp, which used it as a means of refuting the radical papalist exegesis of the Gelasian theory. In a rebuttal of Pope Gregory VII’s arguments regarding the absolute superiority of the clergy in all spheres, an anonymous treatise published around 1090 further stressed two principles, both

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taken from Gelasius, namely, the divine source of imperial power and the prelates’
duty to obey the emperor in regard to everything pertaining to the ordo publicae
disciplinae.

The use of the Gelasian theory to defend the independence of political leaders
vis-à-vis the papal offensive spread beyond the imperial camp and served the
spokesmen of the English and French monarchs, as well. Thus, Hugh of Fleury
(1102-1105) cited the Gelasian theory as proof of the divine source of royal power
and as justification for the desired division of labour between king and pope.
Inspired by another work of Gelasius, the Thomus de anathematis vinculo,
he further claimed that, historically, only prelates had served in both spiritual and
temporal functions. However, knowing human frailty, Jesus Christ had prescribed
the division of power in His magnificent dictum (Matthew XXII: 21). Yet, Hugh
found it difficult to persevere in the divine command, and he, too, confused the
boundaries between the two orders in acknowledging the king’s right to control the
clergy within the boundaries of his kingdom.

The resumption of the struggle between pope and emperor in the early
thirteenth century again placed the Gelasian theory at the focus of political
argument. Frederick II showed some loyalty to Gelasian principles when he
declared his recognition of the divine right of the two powers within the sphere
respectively controlled by each one. Frederick’s example was further followed by
some of his supporters, who, like those of Henry IV in the past, considered the
Gelasian theory to be a powerful shield against any attempt at papal intervention or
control over the two swords. The papalist interpretation of the Gelasian theory
–i.e., its radical exegesis– won however some support outside the papal curia,
among the high clergy and members of the monastic orders. Among the most
important speakers on behalf of the radical interpretation of the Gelasian theory,

28 Libelli de lite, M.G.H., vol. ii, 187, 231. See, also, ZAFARANA, Z., «Ricerche sul Liber de
unitate ecclesiae conservanda», Studi Medievali, 1966, vol. VII, pp. 691-700. The imperial claims were
qualified by A. Fliche as a step toward the idea of sovereignty, a quite premature conclusion in light of
the authors’ wide identification with the Gelasian theory at this early stage; see, Fliche, A., «Les
29 GELASIUS I, Thomus de anathematis vinculo, in SCHWARTZ, E. (ed.), Publizistische
Sammlungen zum acacianischen Schisma, München, 1887, 14-5-23.
30 HUGONIS MONACHI FLORIACENSIS, Tractatus de regiae potestate et sacerdotali dignitate, I, 1, 2,
31 HUILLARD-BREHOLLES, J. (ed.), Historia Diplomatica Frederici Secundi, Paris, Henricus Plon,
32 CAESARIUS VON HEISTERBACH, The Dialogus on Miracles, (trans. and ed. SCOTT, H. and
one should mention Bernard de Clairvaux, Hugues de St. Victor, John of Salisbury, in the twelfth century and St. Bonaventura in the thirteenth, all of whom left their personal input on medieval theology.

However, the claim to superiority based on the clergy's sacramental status and the resulting demand for indirect papal control of the two swords was also seen as over-reaching, an unnecessary ecclesiastical abuse of the desired harmony between the two universal political institutions of Christendom. Even among those thinkers who harboured reservations about the imperial point of view, there were some, especially among the canonists, who advocated a return to Gelasian moderation. Partisans of a more moderate perspective of the Gelasian theory numbered Gratian, Ivo of Chartres, Cardinal Deusdedit, Huguccio of Pisa, Stephen of Tournai, and Rufinus, who conceived the Gelasian theory as a demand for non-intervention, each order being prohibited from trespassing on the other’s domain: *Nec apostolicum secularia, nec principem ecclesiastica procurare oportet*.

Pope Innocent III, as well, in his letter to Emperor Alexius of Constantinople, recognized the Gelasian principles of the divine source of both secular and priestly authorities and the desirability of their separation. However, by using the symbolism of the sun (priesthood) and the moon (kingship), the pope hinted at the superiority of priest over prince, an allegorical reflection of Innocent’s well-known recognition of the

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37 Decretum, XCVI, in *C.I.C.*, 6, I, p. 1340.

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priority of the *spiritualia* over the *temporalia*; still, such precedence did not by itself allow any arbitrary intervention in each other’s field. And, indeed, the moderate interpretation of the Gelasian theory found support among the most outstanding theologians in the second half of the thirteenth century. Both Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas supported Gelasius’s tenets as the ideal means of neutralizing the more radical positions in both papalistic and anti-papalistic camps.\(^{43}\)

The debate about the most suitable division of labour involving Church and State between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries was further characterized by a conscious attempt to broaden the audience of each of the conflicting camps through the intensive use of treatises, letters, a new evangelical exegesis, and a continuous appeal to the authority of an infallible past, all strategies common to both the papal curia and the imperial court.\(^{44}\) Rhythmic prose became an exact technique, known as *cursus romanae curiae*. Letters continued to offer an important communication channel in parallel to the emergence of epistolary rhetoric manuals. The first treatise on epistolary rhetoric was written by the Benedictine monk Alberic of Monte Cassino at the end of the eleventh century and the first “epistolary encyclopaedia” (*Summa dictaminis*), written by Bernard of Meung, appeared about 1190.\(^{45}\) Treatises and pamphlets complemented the missives, reflecting the more pluralistic character of the authors, among them canonists and lawyers in general.\(^{46}\) In contrast to the monastic nature of previous authors, these writers were in a closer contact with broader sectors of contemporary society in the framework of the emerging universities, especially the faculties of Roman and

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\(^{45}\) BOUREAU, «The Letter-writing Norm», p. 36, 24, 37.

Canon Law\textsuperscript{47}. Innocent III faithfully reflects the papal awareness of the importance of the young universities in building a supportive public opinion. Indeed, the pope took care to send to Bologna some of his most important decretals –among them, \textit{Per venerabilem} (1202) and \textit{Novit} (1204)– to serve as learning material for the promising intellectual elite of Christendom\textsuperscript{48}. The use of metaphors, such as the two swords and the moon and the sun further facilitated the reception of the otherwise rhetorical Gelasian message and allowed its use for different, if not opposite, goals.

The end of the thirteenth century heralds the waning of the Gelasian theory, with the unprecedented violence characteristic of the second cycle in the endless conflict between King Philip the Fair of France\textsuperscript{49} and Pope Boniface VIII. The imprisonment of Bernard Saisset, Bishop Pamiers by royal messengers in open contravention of traditional ecclesiastical prerogatives\textsuperscript{50}, and only a few years after the first struggle on the fiscal immunity of the clergy\textsuperscript{51}, did not leave the pope with much room for diplomatic maneuvering. Boniface thus censured Philip the Fair for misgovernment and announced that his trial would be carried out during the deliberations of the forthcoming council, to be convened at Rome on 30 October 1302 (\textit{Salvator mundi} and \textit{Ausculta Fili}). Four archbishops, thirty-five bishops, six abbots, and several doctors answered the papal summons notwithstanding royal


pressure to preclude their departure ad liminam apostolorum. The bull Unam Sanctam (18 November 1302), which was the outcome of the Council of Rome, reflects the most extreme papalist interpretation of the Gelasian theory. Though Boniface still conceded the existence of two swords, any significant distinction between them was rendered meaningless, since the pope demanded the complete submission of the temporal sword to the dictates of the Church. Both swords were to be at the complete and free disposal of the clergy, the pope at its head: “Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: ‘Put up thy sword into thy scabbard’ [Matthew XXVI: 52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword, but the former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church [emphasis mine]; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest”. The concluding paragraph of the papal document did not leave room for doubt as to Boniface’s firm determination to establish once and for ever the complete hegemony of the Apostolic See: “Therefore whoever resists this power thus ordained by God, resists the ordinance of God [Romans XIII: 2], unless he invents like Manicheus two beginnings, which is false and judged by us heretical, since according to the testimony of Moses, it is not in the beginnings but in the beginning that God created heaven and earth [Genesis I: 1]. Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff”52. True, one may find other examples of extreme declarations of this kind that had been voiced since the times of the Gregorian Reform53. Moreover, by the end of the thirteenth century the papal postulates were being unambiguously voiced by Gilles de Rome, Archbishop of Bourges and former preceptor of Philip the Fair, whose book on ecclesiastical power served as the main source of inspiration for the papal bull54. Still, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the political implications of the papal claims were of an unprecedented nature: Boniface did not confront a vulnerable emperor with universal aspirations, but a “national” monarch with well-defined political goals, pursuing sovereignty within the borders of his kingdom55. No wonder, therefore, that the papal offensive did not remain without response and actually

53 See notes 32-35.
brought about one of the most formidable propaganda campaigns in the Middle Ages.

In his no less powerful response to the papal claims, Philip the Fair decided to turn his struggle with the pope on matters of hegemony into an issue of “national defense”, which, as such, called for the unconditional enrollment of all the inhabitants of the realm, laity as well as clergy. By a manipulative use of papal documents, and even their forgery, the king turned Boniface henceforth into not only a political threat to the Kingdom of France but also a heretical menace to the purity of Christendom as a whole, with the pope’s religious and moral values being scrutinized ad personam by “the most Christian king” and his close ministers. But Philip the Fair was not satisfied with the limited scope of a personal battle against the pope, which was so characteristic of the Investiture Contest. In a most formidable propaganda campaign, he attempted and to great measure also succeeded in transforming the conflict into a national struggle against the enemy of the realm, Pope Boniface VIII. Thus, for the first time in the history of the Capetian monarchy, Philip called for an assembly of the three estates, to be held in Paris (8 April 1302). Nobles and bishops received a personal summons while bailiffs and seneschals were required to call for the election of two or three representatives of towns who would receive full powers of representation. In a deliberate attempt to broaden the struggle between king and priest beyond the personal sphere, the king was further portrayed as the faithful representative of “the whole kingdom, the nobility and all prelates, abbots, priors and doyens, provosts, procurators of chapters and monasteries, colleges, universities, and the communes of the towns of the realm”. Using forged documents deliberately prepared for this purpose, Pierre Flote, one of the king’s main advisors, reported to the assembly about Boniface’s many offenses against the king and the kingdom. According to Flote, the pope’s


continuous and deliberate attempts to harm the independence of the realm made it imperative to take efficient measures against Boniface VIII and his detrimental policy. Thus, the obvious and also justified conclusion was to judge the pope on charges of heresy in the Kingdom of France, but with the support not only of all inhabitants of the realm but of Christendom as a whole.

Notwithstanding the unprecedented nature of such a frontal attack against the vicar of God on earth, the royal attempts to judge Boniface on charges of heresy—detailed further by another spokesman of the king’s close circle, Guillaume de Nogaret—received the massive support of the third estate; in contrast, many of the nobles and prelates were more reluctant to ardently follow the royal Catholic zeal. The hesitations if not the open opposition of the upper classes led to their being summoned to two additional assemblies, in February-March and in June 1303. In parallel, Philip the Fair sent special messengers to the provinces in order to broaden support for his aggressive policy against the pope. This stage further reflects the high efficiency of the royal communications system and its ability to systematically and quickly adapt its channels according to changing circumstances. The king’s representatives, laity or members of the clergy, approached their public directly and reported the decisions of the Paris assembly, while adapting their appeal to the respective audiences—clergy, monks, or townsmen. In exceptional cases, when support of the king’s policy was denied—as it was among the Dominicans—the dissenters were ordered to leave the kingdom on the grounds that their refusal annulled de facto the royal protection that they had enjoyed hitherto. Although the royal campaign was not altogether successful, letters of adherence from different provinces began arriving at the court from 18th July 1303 onwards. Against the vociferous support of royal policy by the townsmen, the nobility and the clergy opted, again, for a more neutral stance, thus reflecting the conflict of opinion over the aggressive policy pursued by the Capetian court against the pope.

The difficult position of the clergy is rather understandable because of their double allegiance: to Philip the Fair, their temporal, nearby lord, on the one hand,
and to Boniface VIII, their spiritual leader in faraway Rome, on the other. Likewise, the hesitations of the nobility hint at their fears of a centralizing royal policy, one that threatened not only ecclesiastical prerogatives but, first and foremost, their own privileged status, as well. Guillaume de Plaisans provided a faithful reflection of Philip the Fair’s political creed, which raised much concern among the upper classes: “The king [of France] is emperor of his kingdom, with absolute power over sea and land. All the subjects of the kingdom are under his power. Even bishops and priests must obey the laws, rules and decisions of the king in all temporal affairs… Everything within the boundaries of the kingdom belongs to the king, at least in matters of defence, higher legislation and ownership. The king has the power to bestow, to receive and to exploit any and every possession, movable or not, which is in his kingdom for the public wealth and defence of the realm”64. By turning the king of France into imperator... in regno suo, Plaisans actually invalided any division of labor between priest and king and turned the Gelasian platform null and void. The conclusion is rather clear: more than manifesting support of ecclesiastical/papal prerogatives, the reluctance of great sectors of the upper classes to address the royal policy against Boniface VIII was meant to obviate the strengthening of the Capetian monarchy to the detriment of their own, traditional privileges.

The extremist views held by both the papal curia and the Capetian court at the beginning of the fourteenth century thus herald the waning of the Gelasian theory and hint at the meager chances for peaceful and harmonious cooperation between priest and king. The imprisonment of Boniface VIII at Anagni under severe charges of heresy (7 September 1303)65, Boniface’s premature death one month later, and the long and tortuous process against the posthumous pope66, all these events reflect the deteriorating relationship between regnum and sacerdotium. The Church’s traditional privileges, first and foremost the pope’s unique status as vicarius Dei, could not withstand the monarchy’s offensive. The emergence of national monarchies, with their pursuit of sovereignty and jealous defence of the king’s prerogatives, thus relegated Gelasius’s tenets to a secondary position, if any. The new state of affairs was faithfully reflected in the Roman de Fauvel, in which

Gervais du Bus described the political changes of his times, and complained that they contradicted the designs of Providence:

In the beginning God created
The two great lights...
One was the sun; the moon was the other....
But, by the will of God
The sun is higher in heavens...
The temporal power
Which, like the moon, should be inferior,
Has, by a quirk of fate,
Become ruler of Holy Church.\(^67\)

The dynamic, ever-changing relationship between priest and king, Church and State between the fifth and fourteenth centuries justifies the conclusion that the acceptability of the Gelasian theory was connected to, if not the result of, the changing political structures of the times. The weakness of the German monarchies that raised in the framework of the Western Roman Empire as well as the vulnerability of the papacy in the Early Middle Ages encouraged the coexistence of the two main orders of Christendom thus bringing about the emergence and development of the Gelasian theory. From the eleventh century onwards, however, the two-sword metaphor heralded a first step against the Gelasian balance; it became an expression of the development of political entities, especially but not only the Holy Roman Empire, that were gradually paving their way to political independence. The emergence of quasi-national states and the revival of the idea of sovereignty in the fourteenth century actually made the Gelasian theory meaningless.

In parallel, and as a direct result of socio-political permutations characteristic of the Late Middle Ages, one should note the dramatic changes in the communication channels employed and the audiences appealed to by the conflicting sides in the battle between religious and secular authority. The proliferation of political treatises during the struggle between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair has clear precedents in the Investiture Contest, especially during the reigns of Henry IV and Frederick II\(^68\); however, their number and scope by the beginning of the


fourteenth century were unprecedented\textsuperscript{69}. The difference, though, was more than of a quantitative nature; it was characterized, as well, by the involvement of a new kind of civil servants, the king’s champions from the emerging bourgeoisie. They were the main factor in shaping a supportive public opinion in favor of the crown among the townsmen\textsuperscript{70}. As Joseph Strayer defined it so well, the moment that the French monarchy became the main “employer” of the universities’ graduates, the Church then lost its former monopoly over public opinion\textsuperscript{71}. The assemblies promoted by Philip the Fair and the royal messengers sent throughout the kingdom to crystallize a supportive public opinion were clear manifestations of the Capetian court’s awareness of the innovative nature of the king’s policy, on the one hand, and of the resulting need for support from broader sectors of contemporary society, on the other\textsuperscript{72}. In contrast to the novel character of the royal propaganda campaign, one should note the traditional nature of papal policy, which embodied not only the same message but also the same channels –papal bulls and the summoning of councils– that characterized the pontificates of Gregory VII and Innocent III, as well. In this regard, one may conclude that Boniface’s fiasco was not the result of his original policy stance; on the contrary, it was the result of the pope’s failure to deal with the new challenges with innovative and more suitable means of communication.

The secularization process that characterized the early fourteenth century heralds, indeed, the beginning of a new era\textsuperscript{73}, in which the Gelasian theory and the two-sword metaphor gradually became anachronisms. One of the main promoters of this change was the “national” king, who regarded himself as emperor within the bounds of his limited kingdom. True, a myth cannot so easily be uprooted, and the Gelasian theory and the two-sword metaphor appeared sporadically during the Avignon Period, as well, in the writings of Alvarus Pelagius, James of Viterbo, and

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Augustinus Triumphus⁷⁴. However, it inevitably became the voice of a distant past, without much chance of implementation. The new political ruler, motivated by concepts of sovereignty, deprived the Gelasian theory of all legitimacy, condemning it out of hand. Philip IV did not confront the Gelasian theory as reflecting an existing reality, which it was not, nor had it ever been. Regarding himself as the representative of the general good and as being charged simultaneously with the defence of the realm, the Catholic Faith, the Christian Church, and the Holy Land⁷⁵, according to royal propaganda Philip embodied a perfect totality that left no room for any other partners. It may therefore be concluded that in the early fourteenth century, swords gradually became anachronistic not only on the field of battle but in the realm of political theory, as well. The secular sword eventually won the battle for supportive public opinion and paved the way for a new period in the history of political communication. In a rather symbolic way, the older dictum of vox populi, vox Dei –i.e., of the Church—turned, by the force of circumstances, into vox populi, vox Regis: the king, actually, the rex Christianissimus now becoming the most faithful and suitable delegate of the will of God and of the Christian Faith on earth⁷⁶.

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⁷⁵ All these claims were pronounced in an anonymous sermon in the early fourteenth century; see, LECLERCQ, D. J., «Un sermon prononcé pendant la guerre de Flandre sous Philippe le Bel», Revue du moyen âge latin, 1945, vol. I, pp. 165-172.

⁷⁶ For an additional example, see, BOUREAU, A., «L’adage vox populi, vox Dei et l’invention de la nation anglaise (VIIIème-Xème siècle)», Annales ESC, juillet-octobre 1992, n° 4-5, pp. 1071-1089.