

Pre-Modern Social Movements: A Research Note

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Abstract: This paper looks at the pre-modern movements of the Crusades and the Reformation, and examines the applicability of the model of mass social movements advanced by Tilly and extended by Pakulski. Although originally intended for more modern mass movements only, this model is applicable for the analysis of pre-modern movements, once an allowance is made for the speed of transmission of both the discontent and the ‘message’ of the movement as well as the generally slower pace of change.

With a few notable exceptions (Tilly 1978, 1986; Cohn 1957) social movements have been seen as modern phenomena. They have been seen as responses to modern conditions such as alienation, commodification, rationalisation and anomie, and are ‘overflows’ of the conventional politics that formed contemporaneously with the modern state. As argued here, this limitation may be unduly restrictive. The concept of social movement, and the theoretical constructs applied to modern movements, can be extended to pre-modern ‘politics of moral protest’ (Pakulski 1991). This extension of the universe of discourse does, however, call for some extension of the theoretical schemes, especially in the loosening of the typologies of mass movements. I suggest such a typology in the final section of this note.

The Weberian inspired model of mass social movements suggested by Tilly and Pakulski emphasises the moral, substantive or value orientation of social actors. Additionally, social movements are characterised by adversarial nature and negative reference, origins in a real or perceived crisis, and inclusiveness and polymorphism.

Movements employ the repertoires of behaviour that were established in earlier times, and adapt these repertoires to meet new situations. Increasingly, this is done consciously as a bricolage or ‘do-it-yourself’ construction of former elements of behaviour. Taking this point, the typology of moral protest for this century should be similar to that of earlier protests. I argue that this interpretive and theoretical framework fits well in the cases of the Crusades movement and the Reformation movement. They were crisis triggered, substantively oriented and adversarial in their character.

While modern movements have as their referent the Nation-state, in pre-modern times this political referent was to the broader entity of Christendom, sometimes within a chiliastic framework (Cohn 1957: 32). The orientation of the Crusades movement was away from the chaotic free-for-all of the early feudal period and towards a united Christendom led by the Papacy, which was increasingly concerned with secular power as a means to furthering its spiritual control (Morris 1989, Duchesne 1972). That of the Reformation movements was in the reverse direction. The pre-modern movements examined add a further millenarian dimension with a vague vision of the moral order as opposed to the clear negative references of modern movements.

The Crusades

To an extent, the late Dark Ages was a period of considerable progress (White 1964). In the East, a formula of accommodation and coexistence had been informally reached between Christian and Islamic rulers (Hallam 1989: 15-29). In the Barbarian West, the low population meant that there was continual room for expansion, with increasing tracts of land being brought under cultivation using new technology (Wallace-Hadrill 1985). This availability of land implied a degree of individual freedom, as the dissatisfied could, and did, move on. This freedom could also be seen as the resources of the state or *res publica* were privatised into individual holdings as *res privatae* inheritable by increasingly lower ranked persons (Duby 1995). Similarly, this freedom was seen not only in the secular realm, but also in the religious, with a variety of liturgies and practices holding sway from the Celtic West to the Nestorian Far-East.

In the eleventh century, with increases in population, this situation changed. The secular looseness disappeared under the blanket of growing feudalism. This led to a stress on military adventurism in an attempt by families to secure increasingly scarce land. The younger sons lacked the ability to conveniently establish a living: “... there was also a land-hunger to incite them, especially in northern France, where the practice of primogeniture was being established.” (Runciman 1953). These conditions affected all levels of society, creating a large cohort of rootless and underemployed persons. A dispossessed generation of younger sons grew up into the

options of brigandage, sometimes disguised (as ‘taxes’) and sometimes not, or of entry into the Church (Cipolla 1976). As Urban II is reported to have said in his proclamation at Clermont ^[1]: “the land ... is crowded by your large numbers ... it does not suffice for the supply of riches and scarcely provides food for its cultivators. That is why you quarrel among yourselves, wage war and often wound and kill each other” ^[2] (Morris 1989: 37).

“Life for a peasant . . . was grim and insecure. The organisation of the demesne was breaking down, but no orderly system was taking its place . . . the population was increasing, and holdings in a village could not be subdivided beyond a certain limit ... recent years had been especially difficult. Floods and pestilence in 1094 had been followed by drought and famine in 1095. ... Already in April 1095 a shower of meteorites had presaged a great movement of peoples.” (Runciman 1953: 114-5)

This population increase is evidenced by the increase in the numbers of monks and clergy in the eleventh century (Brooke 1964: 60-63, Gimpel 1983, Morris 1989: 37). That the choice of a Church career was not always the preferred option of these men can be seen in the decline in standards of the Church of the time. This was directly traced by contemporaries to a malaise in the Church: “... manifold evils were growing in all parts of Europe because of wavering faith” (Fulcher 1941: Book 1, Ch 1).

Partially independent of the economic problems, the first century of this millennium was a time of great political turmoil. Emperor faced anti-Emperor, Pope faced anti-Pope and several of the rulers of the time were under excommunication for various ‘offences’. Henry IV was Holy Roman Emperor during 1056-1106; while Rudolph of Swabia (1077-1081), Hermann of Luxembourg (1081-1093), and Conrad of Franconia (1093-1106) were anti-Emperors. Leo IX (1049-54), Victor II (1055-7), Stephen IX (1057-8), Nicholas II (1059-61), Alexander II (1061-73), Gregory VII (1073-85), Victor III (1086-87), and Urban II (1088-99) represented the legitimate Papacy; while Benedict X (1058-9), Honorius II (1061-72) and Clement III (1080 and 1084-1100) were anti-Popes (Kelly 1986: 154-160). The rulers under excommunication included Harold Godwinson of England, the Emperor Henry IV and Phillip I of France. Justification for these bans varied widely, but usually involved an alleged breach of promise and trust, or a conflict with the Papacy. As well, in regard to Phillip: “the pope particularly stressed that the king acted like a robber, squeezed money from merchants and from pilgrims to Rome, and levelled churches to the ground.” (Erdman 1962: 162).

This uncertainty triggered a mass protest movement directed against what was seen as a threat to the integrity of Christendom. While the discontent and the critical diagnosis of the situation were shared by the more powerful elements of the population, there was no agreement between actors as to what would constitute the proper restoration. The movement had the available identity-image of the Christian warrior (Gies 1987), an enemy without, a repertoire open to innovations and a clear sense of the evil that afflicted Christendom (see Kedar 1984 for the stages in the evolution of this image). The focus was on the Muslim ‘occupation’ of various ex-Christian territories, as well as an internal moral laxity of the Church. It was felt that the latter could be cured by increased internal discipline and, if necessary both could be extirpated by Crusade (Armstrong 1988: 1-53).

The first actions of the movement that ended in the Crusades lay in the proclamation, at Le Puy, of the Peace of God (CE975) and later (CE1027), its extension to the Truce of God (Brooke 1964: 178-9). This continued attempt to civilise the warriors (Elias 1982) by various prohibitions against violence, culminated in an attempt to outlaw all war between Christians (at Narbonne in CE1054). Despite these attempts, this weak part of the movement was assimilated into the (then) open and flexible feudal system as the provider of the primary elements of the new concept of chivalry (Bloch 1975, Barber 1980, Jaeger 1985).

With increasing complaints about disorder in the Papacy and the Church generally, secular attention centred about the behaviour of the ‘reforming’ Popes and their supporters, such as Hildebrand, later Gregory VII. Of him it was said ^[3] that: “[f]or you rose by the following steps, namely by cunning . . . to money, to money, to preferment, by favour to weapons, and by weapons you came to the throne of peace.”, and: “... on the same night on which the funeral obsequies of Pope Alexander were carried out ... [Hildebrand] violently seized the Lateran palace with hired troops; since none of the clergy wished to elect him, he with the drawn swords of his men terrified them with threats of death into not daring to oppose him; and ... [thus] ... he sprang upon the long besieged throne.”, from the Decree of the Synod of Brixen quoted in Erdman (1977: 158-9) and Morrison (1978: 49).

Gregory was himself conscious of the unrest in the Church, and its focus: "... the highest office of the Church has for a long time been in a state of collapse by reason of sin, partly through the inexperience, partly through the negligence of the clergy. In consequence countless evils have sprung up, as it were from a corrupt root." (cited in Emerton 1969: 147)

The movement to cleanse Christianity had many leaders in the persons of Popes, Emperors, Bishops and Abbots. Gradually, the increasingly important senior clerics with a background in the monasteries, such as Gregory VII, moved the Papacy into the prime position. In a movement that was becoming increasingly centralist, the Pope had a readily legitimated claim to some primacy. A move was made to use the holy war banner of St Peter (the *bellicum sancti Petri vexillum*) to present a unified Christian and evangelical front against external, instead of internal, foes. Previously this had been the other way around: "[t]he only occasion when nothing is heard of him (Gregory VII) is when the Papacy intervened in the Sicilian and Spanish wars against the heathen. But when a war within Christendom was in question, he was either the leading spirit or at least the executive agent." (Erdman 1977: 108).

Illustrative of the multi-focal nature of this mass social movement was the increase in monastic reform through what is often called the Cluniac movement (Cowdrey 1970). The changes which were initiated out of the Abbey at Cluny, affected both the architecture of the period (Gimpel 1988) and the nature of Western Christianity (Ullman 1955, Duchesne 1972). The spread of monastically trained clerics, from a strict background, throughout Europe and into the Papacy led to a reaction against older and more locally derived folk-church traditions (including clerical marriage and local appointment). The short monopoly of the Papacy by the Cluniac monks^[4] can readily be viewed as an attempt to gain control of a movement and to purge unruly elements (Ullman 1955, Duchesne 1972) in a fashion that is common to many of the anti-democratic movements of the modern era.

Gregory accelerated the attempt to distract attention from internal problems, and used this as part of his endeavour to centralise both secular and spiritual power in the one theocratic set of hands. "This is the way in which Gregory wished to take a kingdom from its king. His words not only show that he envisaged a deposition and dissolution of the oath of fidelity, but also that he intended to establish his own power in place of the king's ..." (Erdman 1977: 163 also Tierney 1964). His letters show an intent to theorise, and then enforce, oaths of fealty from monarchs in Spain, England and Hungary (Emerton 1969) as well as freeing the Papacy from any ties to the Emperor. To foster these ends, the Church even acted to increase the speed of transport, building bridges, and supporting messengers, often despite the wishes of the local secular authorities (Leighton 1972).

Despite Gregory VII's attempts (Emerton 1969: 56 & 60) to raise a Crusade, it was only with the passing of power to Urban II that the movement entered its third and most outwardly directed phase. In 1095 Urban preached the First Crusade at Clermont, articulating the inchoate desires of a large section of the population. The news spread, via travelling preachers, throughout Europe (Runciman 1953: 110-113). The appeal was a direct and value-laden command. Fulcher, who was probably present, quotes Urban as saying: "I speak to those present, I send word to those not here; moreover, Christ commands it." (Fulcher 1941: Book III, Ch 5). Whereas Gregory had talked in more abstract terms of the Church and reform, Urban was able to directly tap guilt and access the issues that appealed to an audience at all social levels. This expression of the movement showed its most polycephalous phase; the multiple leaders of the various Crusades representing most of the great houses of Europe as well as some of its more underprivileged and footloose elements. Leaders of this time included Hugh the Great, Bohemond, Godfrey of Lorraine, Raymond of Provençal, Ademar, the Bishop of Puy, Peter the Hermit, Walter the Penniless, Robert of Normandy, Stephen of Blois, and Robert of Flanders. These were the brother of a King, Dukes, younger scions of great Houses, a poor monk, a devout Bishop and some poor knights.

Once launched, the actual crusades maintained a broad appeal towards all groups in society. "The vast motley collection of enthusiasts that he had gathered together consisted of men from many districts and of many types. Some brought their women with them, some even their children. Most of them were peasants, but there were townfolk among them, there were junior members of knightly families, there were former brigands and criminals. Their only link was the fervour of their faith." (Runciman 1953: 121). They engendered their own countercultural forms of dress that transcended normal sumptuary custom and took on symbols of their faith

and activity: “and so by embroidering the symbol on their clothing in recognition of their faith, in the end they won the True Cross itself. They imprinted the ideal so that they might attain the reality of the ideal.” (Fulcher 1941: Book IV Canto 4). The expressed principles of the movement continued with the centralisation of faith into the Papacy and the elimination of heresy from Europe. Crusaders fought against groups they had defined as enemies of the Church in the Holy Land, Poland, Spain, France (Churton 1987: 67-96) and Byzantium; the issues changing as the movement evolved. The Crusade went through episodes of resurgence and of quiescence. Its actual military activities were, in a sense, secondary to a primary purpose of restoring order to Christendom.

Like more modern mass social movements (the German Fascists are a prime example) the success of the movement spelt its death. Like a modern ‘anti-democratic’ movement it could not survive once its goals began to be achieved. Once the physical motion of the actual Crusade had begun, the strongest elements among its polycephalous leadership gained ascendancy and its characteristics as a mass social movement were co-opted into the fabric of Western European feudal rhetoric.

The Reformation

Much as the period of the Crusades represented a trend towards the centralism analogous to the modern anti-democratic movements, the Reformation was the reaction from the theocratic Church built by Gregory VII into the pluralism of individual biblical interpretation, analogous to a modern anti-partocratic movement. It can be said that “... one primary cause was the individualism of the age; the sense of the worth of the soul or, if one pleases, of the ego” (Janelle, 1968: 95). This led on from an individualistic repertoire of protest against a monolithic church which was established in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by such groups as the Lollards and the Hussites.

The Church of the late fifteenth century was run by a strict, hierarchical and self-perpetuating bureaucracy. “Thus the moral disorders in the Church really had their source in the overgrown development of officialdom, the members of which had come to identify the Church with their own class” (Janelle 1968: 81), a class which derived its authority only from the Pope rather than the Holy Spirit (Pelikan 1968: 11). It was recognised as a corrupt regime under several successive Popes (Kelly 1986: 250-260). Innocent VIII (1484-92) sold Church offices by auction. The Borgia Pope Alexander VI (1492-03) had several children, made one son a Bishop, used his sister as Regent, and employed assassins extensively and openly. “Yet one imagines the impression produced on pious foreigners by such events as the solemn festivities for the second wedding of Alexander VI’s daughter, Lucrece Borgia, one of the shows consisting of licentious dances, at which the pope himself was a spectator.” (Janelle 1968: 91)

A Medici Pope, Leo X (1513-21) was one of the most detested; he was a nepotist and a sybarite, openly selling offices (including that of Cardinal) and having indulgences advertised from the pulpit. Luther openly detested the practices of the Popes when he asked: “[w]hy does the pope, whose wealth is greater than that of the wealthiest banker, not build a basilica of Saint Peter from his own means”, in the *Ninety-five theses concerning indulgences*, Thesis 86 (Hillerbrand 1972: 108). Perhaps his greatest sin, in the perception of the frugal North, where the Reformation would start, was that he left the treasury bankrupt. This behaviour of the various Popes caused a groundswell of discontent among their parishioners.

“Further complaints alleged the divorce of religion from morality, the emphasis laid on orthodox belief rather than on good conduct ... the absorption of religion in ritual, the useless idleness and presumed sterility of monks, the exploitation of popular credulity through bogus relics and miracles, the abuse of excommunication and interdict, the censorship of publications by the clergy, the espionage and cruelty of the Inquisition, the misuse, for other purposes, of funds contributed for crusades against the Turks, and the claim of a deteriorated clergy to be the sole administrators of every sacrament except baptism.” (Durant 1957: 24) ^[5].

By the start of the Reformation, the population of Europe had returned to at least the pre-plague levels, although at different speeds in different countries (McNeill 1985). This resulted in an over-crowded wage labour market which meant that workers experienced a rapid real fall in living standards over the fifteenth century (Hay 1966: 31-44, Cipolla 1976, Rogers 1884, Harvey 1984, Hatcher 1970). There was a cohort of disaffected persons who were available to be exploited (Cole 1972: 98). It should be understood that the pace of change at this time

was so slow that, unlike today where the age cohort may span only ten years, the generational experience of all living people was virtually the same, and they all could be part of the same cohort (Braudel 1984).

We should not regard European society in this period as a homogeneous whole. Swanson (1967: 49) identified 41 distinct 'societies' in Europe in 1490, which were divided into five types of regime. These are commensal, heterarchic, centralist, limited centralist and balanced. The type of regime (open or closed) and its strength dictated whether the movement eventually succeeded in a given area (Swanson 1967: 58). Nascent nationalism caused a chaffing under the morally-bankrupt transnational authority of the Church, and provided ready identity packages for the various movements that arose. These reforming movements tended to have a regional flavour, resulting in a confusion of different churches, prayer and student groups. As examples, such groups included: the Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Polish Brethren and Hussite sects, each of which highlighted some local concerns.

These local concerns varied, in Nürnberg: "[i]t was not enough that the council had to intervene against immoral behaviour of regular and secular clergy; there were also clashes regarding the right of asylum of the monasteries." (Seebass 1972: 21). Whereas elsewhere: "for centuries, morals controls in Geneva had been quite lax. ...What controls were adopted simply tried to regulate moral lapses regarded as inevitable." (Kingdon 1972: 4). Kingdon then goes on to talk about problems with open prostitution, illegitimacy and adultery. Depending on the conditions, some of these groups of reformers became established as loose networks, others as tightly established Churches. Some appeared in several countries, others in one town.

The reforming movement was alternately suppressed and favoured, spreading with the advent of the printing press and printed text (Durant 1957:156-160).

"The development of Luther's theology coincided exactly with the period in which European culture moved from the age of manuscripts to the era of printed books ... Reformers and their opponents moved quickly to exploit the new media (sic) in order to move information and ideas to wide audiences now exposed and subjected to an informational transmission capability unknown in any era previous to the sixteenth century." (Cole 1972: 95)

The printed text, newly available in the vernacular, was followed up by inspiring oratory so that: "[t]he printed media when combined with traditional methods of oral communication through preaching and public oratory became a potent agent of change . . . the presence of the written word combined with fiery orations was an effective dynamic in the process of change." (Cole 1972: 96). The Reformation benefited from some skilled propagandists who could draw on the moral revulsion of the bourgeoisie and then, utilising the leadership of the burghers, all classes. These propagandists were the first to understand both the potential of the printing press and its ability to influence change (Cole 1972: 94). This change was aimed firstly at the literate community leaders, who spread the word. Thus we saw: "[o]n the basis of the religious decision of the council members ... a reforming evangelic movement that encompassed all classes was made possible" (Seebass 1972: 24). This continued until the community was united, as Nürnberg jurist Christoph Scheurl, writing in 1520, observed: "[t]he patriciate, the multitude of other citizens and all scholars stand at Luther's side." (Seebass 1972: 20).

The reform movement could even count on the support of many of the clergy, not just for theological reasons alone, although many did agree with St Paul on the reason for salvation^[6]. While more prominence is given today to these loftier motives, such as: "[w]e hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Romans III, 28), in Durant's opinion (1957: 21) there were other factors as well, "[w]e should consider that sacerdotal concubinage was not profligacy, but an almost universal rebellion against the rule of celibacy that had been imposed on an unwilling clergy by Pope Gregory VII (1074)". This also had good scriptural backing in that: "[a] Bishop must be above reproach, married only once . . . keeping his children submissive", (Timothy III, 2 & 4). These, and many other readings, could show no justification for many of the established attitudes of the Church that had arisen during the earlier periods of centralisation.

Some of the protest was not expressed in a religious fashion. For the peasants, revolt was often an option born out of hopelessness and disgust and against their 'natural' conservatism (Sessions 1972: 137). These peasant revolutions were able to employ the symbols and rhetoric of the rest of the movement. Ninety petitions and documents citing grievances came from Southern Germany alone around 1523. Of these only 29 were couched

in strictly secular terms, and 16 contained multiple religious demands (Hillerbrand 1972: 121-126). The career trajectory of the Reformation movements were completed by either suppression or institutionalisation into State religions. Which course was followed depended on the strength and openness of the state that the individual part of the reforming movements existed in. For some countries, such as France, the struggle to suppress reform would continue unabated for centuries.

Conclusion

The key typological dimension of the pre-modern movements is centralism versus polycentrism. In the absence of a modern state, the negative systemic reference was to the Christendom and the feudal administrative apparatus. While the Crusades were the response to the collapse of the central moral authority, the Reformation was primarily a protest against this resurgent centralization of the Church, which was devoid of moral (traditional) legitimacy.

In particular, it is argued that, like the modern movement, the pre-modern ones can be interpreted as adversarial (unified against rather than for) and anti-systemic. The systemic reference is different, but equally well articulated. The reference was not to the state, which lacked a sufficiently cohesive structure at this time, but to the moral-administrative order of Christendom generally. Only the Church had the characteristics of being sufficiently 'advanced' in its development that it could serve the function later played by the nation-state. Both movements were triggered by the sense of threat to this order, and to its moral (traditional) legitimacy. Both utilized some established repertoires of discontent, but while the Crusades movement was strongly centralistic — in response to what was considered as a threat to the moral integrity of Christendom — the Reformation movement was anti-centralistic — against what was considered as an illegitimate centralism of the Roman Papacy (largely stemming from the theocratic aspirations of Gregory VII and others). In this sense both movements are analogous to the anti-democratic and anti-partocratic movements of the modern era. Their spread and activities were much slower than their modern contemporaries due to the slower communications available to their propagators at the time they evolved (Leighton 1972).

Mass social movements can thus be seen to be not a solely modern phenomenon. While the particular causes of discontent triggering an individual movement's mobilization have varied, they can be observed throughout history to have the same basic characteristics. What makes each epoch appear to have a differing wave of movements is that both the milieu they work within and their means of propagation are continually modernising.

Footnotes

[1] We lack an actual copy of Urban's sermon, and must rely on the published accounts. However, these accounts were published contemporaneously and were never denied by Urban.

[2] Whilst it must be acknowledged that Urban was moralising from his pulpit, his sermon must have had some basis in reality for it to have struck a chord in his listeners.

[3] This was written in a deposition by his arch-enemy Henry IV who claimed many proofs of his statements.

[4] The first of these was Urban II.

[5] For a detailed account of these abuses, see Durant (1957: 3-335).

[6] Romans V, in particular verse 1: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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