

Anna Grzymała-Busse. *Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023. vii +235 pages. Paper, \$29.95.

Incorporating and building upon scholarship that stresses the medieval antecedents of the modern European state, historian Anna Grzymała-Busse presents a compelling argument that the medieval Catholic Church profoundly affected state formation in Europe. In *Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State*, Grzymała-Busse contends that the Catholic Church is the key ingredient to understanding the method and means by which Europe's leaders managed to accrue and affirm authority over diverse territories and populations. Over the course of generations, medieval Europe's multifarious secular leaders selectively adopted and adapted the church's institutional, administrative, and human resources, thereby eventually gaining the ability to subordinate the church to the state.

Grzymała-Busse appropriately highlights the transformative aspects of the Gregorian Reform initiated under Gregory VII, who served as pope from 1073 to 1085. Gregory VII became the first pope to depose a monarch. Grzymała-Busse describes how the Investiture Controversy of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries pitted European monarchs against Gregory VII's energetic pontificate. The controversy arose over the established privilege of secular rulers to install and invest the church's bishops. Throughout the book, Grzymała-Busse points out the importance of bishops, who sat in royal councils and national assemblies while both competing with and cultivating Europe's burgeoning states. Bishops were commanding figures in medieval Europe. Unfortunately for the bishops, the actions of rival popes during the Western Schism from 1378 to 1417 served to weaken the church's power.

The book begins with a summary of relations between Roman pontiffs and European rulers in the Middle Ages: "The church first liberated itself from imperial control in the late eleventh

century; grew in power, ambition, and administrative capacity in the twelfth and thirteenth; and then overreached, fractured, and lost most of its political influence in the late fourteenth,” writes Grzymała-Busse (p. 41). Competition amongst Roman pontiffs and European rulers generated many of the European state system’s most significant characteristics, including the separation of ecclesiastical and secular authority, the notion of sovereignty, and the endurance of smaller states in a divided Europe. “Contrary to dominant accounts, which claim that early modern secular wars winnowed out large, consolidated states,” Grzymała-Busse maintains that “medieval religious conflict enabled smaller states to survive and self-governing communes to arise” (p. 74). The Holy Roman Empire and Italy would persist as politically fragmented territories for centuries, reflecting the calculated policy of the medieval papacy, which struggled to liberate the Catholic Church and keep it liberated from European rulers. In contrast, other leaders in locales as disparate as England, France, Scandinavia, and Spain were able to consolidate their territorial authority. Grzymała-Busse rightly notes the pontificate of Boniface VIII, whose papal clout from 1294 to 1303 was heartily contested by Europe’s nascent powerful monarchs, most notably Philip IV of France.

After examining the ongoing rivalry between the church and secular rulers, along with the fragmentation of Europe, Grzymała-Busse makes clear how the medieval church inspired state formation through emulation, as monarchical courts tailored ecclesiastical models to their own ruling institutions. Indeed, the papal court’s diligent judiciary, effective chancery, and financial organization served as a bureaucratic template. The book traces the practices of Europe’s modern state institutions back to the eleventh-century papal court. Grzymała-Busse emphasizes that the essential monarchical “institutions of administration, fiscal management and the judiciary were all patterned on papal precedents” (p. 112). Many, but not all, secular rulers copied papal court models to varying degrees.

The Catholic Church was indispensable to the propagation and ascent of regulation and education in Europe. In a chapter on law and learning, Grzymała-Busse explains how the church “advanced the ideas of the impersonal state, property rights and contracts, corporations, and the very notions of the equitable rule of law and the government as the common good” in the Middle Ages (p. 113). Prior to the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church and its universities enabled the rule of law and higher education to flourish in distinctive ways across Europe.

The book’s concluding chapter evaluates European parliaments and corporate representation. Acknowledging that various types of consensual governance blossomed in Europe prior to the church’s apparent impact on parliamentary development, Grzymała-Busse digs into the Middle Ages to find the roots of European parliaments and their ability to “promote economic growth and build the state by ensuring secure property rights, consent to taxation, predictable investment environments, and the peaceful resolution of conflict” (p. 144). Grzymała-Busse makes evident that knowledge of Roman Catholic hierarchy, doctrine, infrastructure, and administrative machinery and practices are critical for understanding the ins and outs of the development of European parliamentary operations and procedures. “Representative assemblies in Europe,” she concludes, may well be grateful to the Catholic Church for supplying “the precedents of mandatory summons and majority rule; new concepts of consent, binding representation and parliamentary supremacy; and the clergy who served in parliaments and propagated church ideas” (p. 176). With an introduction containing a thorough review of the literature and an appendix of impressive data sets, *Sacred Foundations: The Religious and Medieval Roots of the European State* will be pleasing to scholars and students interested in knowing how the mighty, moneyed, and methodical Catholic Church shaped long-term political development in Europe.

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