the CATHOLIC CHURCH and
European State Formation, AD 1000–1500
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For our parents
Preface

This book tells a story about the role of religious actors, institutions, and ideas in the creation of the political structures that characterize the modern world. We are today living in societies that are thoroughly secular; one might even be tempted to term them atheist, at least in the case of Western and Central Europe. But as generations of historians have emphasized, these secular societies are an offspring of Christianity, or more particularly Western Christianity, centred on the Roman or Catholic Church (Berman 1983; Moore 2000; Siedentop 2014).

Take, for instance, the French historian Fernand Braudel's (1993[1987]) influential textbook, *A History of Civilizations*. Braudel notes that Christianity is the source of the 'Western' way of life, for atheists as well as fervent believers: 'Ethical rules, attitudes to life and death, the concept of work, the value of effort, the role of women and children—these may seem to have nothing to do with Christian feeling; yet they all derive from it nevertheless' (23). T. S. Eliot said much the same in a broadcast to defeated Germany in 1945: 'An individual European may not believe that the Christian Faith is true; and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all … depend on [the Christian heritage] for its meaning' (quoted in Davies 1997, 9). According to Braudel (1993[1987], 333), even the Western rationalism that has fiercely attacked Christianity is ultimately derived from it.

This is merely one example of what Francis Oakley (2015, 290) terms the great 'Western paradox': that the 'process of desacralization [secularization] was itself religiously driven'. To fully take this in, we need to free ourselves from a particular set of theoretical priors or preconceptions which infuse much of modern social science: The tendency to emphasize 'lay' dimensions of social and political relations at the expense of 'religious' dimensions. A key reason that many social scientists have neglected the Catholic Church's role in fostering modern political structures and social norms is that academics working out of secular Western research environments have been blindfolded in one respect. Looking back on other historical periods from a position where the study of politics, and to a lesser extent politics more generally, has emancipated
itself from the grasp of religion—what Max Weber termed the ‘disenchantment’ (*Entzauberung*) of the modern world—they have ignored how religious beliefs shaped and justified political actions in ‘premodern’ societies.

A more genuine historical understanding of Western state formation needs to factor in religion. As Blanning (2007, 285) points out, even the eighteenth-century ‘age of reason’ might just as well be termed ‘the age of religion’. And when we go further back in European history, religious institutions and actors become even more prominent:

Throughout the Middle Ages people were confronted with two distinct and quite incommensurable realities: the towering stone castle and the towering stone cathedral; Caesar and Christ; sovereignty on the one hand and salvation on the other.

( Holmes 1979, 125)

Stephen Holmes’s flowery passage captures the main theme of this book, namely the ubiquitous conflicts between lay and religious power. However, we take as a starting point the simple observation that for centuries and centuries, the towering castle and the towering cathedral¹ were not two incommensurable realities; they were one whole. Until the mid-eleventh century, religious and lay power was fused rather than divided in the Latin West—just as has been the norm in most other historical societies, including the other important Christian medieval society, the Byzantine Empire centred on the great city of Constantinople. It was the breakup of this whole, and the tensions and interactions between lay and religious authority that followed, which were to shape the course Europe took with respect to state formation and regime change. This momentous breakup began in the eleventh century, but the consequent conflict, cooperation, and contact between the ‘two swords’ of authority was only concluded in modern times.

In the chapters that follow, we show how the great conflict of church and state set in train both the development of political institutions of self-government and the European multistate system. Our aim is to remove the secular veneer of these institutions and social orders and show how they sprang from lay–religious interactions and conflicts. The book thus follows the age-old injunctions to gain understanding of the present by delving into the past. It is prompted by the warning, voiced by Cicero in Antiquity, and echoed by David

¹ The image is of course anachronistic as both the stone castle and the stone cathedral, at least in the way Holmes envisioned them, belong to the period after the conflict of church and state.
Hume during the Scottish Enlightenment, that, in Simon Schama’s (2000, 16) rendering:

cultures without history doom themselves to remain trapped in the most illusory tense of all, the present, akin to small children who know neither whence they have come nor whither they go.

The work that culminates with this book of course also has a history, though a rather shorter one. It began in earnest in 2014, when Jørgen Møller published an article that contrasted the European multistate system with that of Warring States China. The article identified the Catholic Church as a crucial part of the bundle of factors that allowed strong social groups to balance rulers, which—the article suggested—was the main reason that Europe avoided the hegemony or imperialization we find in China, where the multistate system was rolled up in BC 221 by the state of Qin, never to reappear. In a string of subsequent articles, Møller pursued more specific aspects of this argument, including the way the Church affected lay state-building, the rule of law, and political institutions of representation and consent. He eventually teamed up with Jonathan Stavnskær Doucette, who in 2018 began working on the importance of Catholic monastic orders for the medieval development and spread of urban self-government. These two strands of work come together in this book, which also returns to and augments the notion that the Church affected the character of the state system in Europe.

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914–32, reproduced with permission from Oxford University Press. Shorter sections from these four articles have also found their way into some of the other chapters in the book.

We would like to thank our editor, Dominic Byatt, who has supported this book wholeheartedly, and who organized a very valuable review process. We are indebted to three reviewers—one of whom read an earlier draft of the entire manuscript—and the book has clearly benefited from their refreshing insights and thoughtful critique. We would also like to thank several friends and colleagues who have helped us with encouragement, advice, and feedback. The Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, is a great place to work, and a place where one is free to pursue ideas the outside world might consider quaint or of antiquated interest only. Thanks to head of department Peter Munk Christiansen for insisting that research should be of high quality but need not be a slave to the fads of the political system or wider society. At the department, we are particularly indebted to Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jakob Tolstrup, Suthan Krishnarajan, David Andersen, Kees van Kersbergen, Clara Neupert-Wentz, Anders Gammelholm Wieland, and Morten Valbjørn. They have provided excellent comments on our work and made this work a lot of fun, at least until we were all quarantined in our homes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Outside of the department, we have been fortunate to receive help, encouragement, and comments from Jacob Gerner Hariri, David Stasavage, Thomas Ertman, Lisa Blaydes, and Anna Grzymala-Busse. Thanks also to Scott Abramson for generously sharing data with us. Finally, a special thanks goes to Andrej Kokkonen, who served as co-supervisor on Jonathan’s PhD project and who has followed this project from the start and provided excellent—and often highly amusing—comments on most of the material and on positive or negative reviewer comments to the articles that we have published along the way. Any remaining errors are our own.
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Introduction
Bringing the Church Back In

It was 25 January, in the midst of winter. The year was 1077, and the King of the Romans and emperor-to-be1 Henry IV, ruler of the largest and most powerful European realm, was prostrating himself before the gate of the Tuscan castle of Canossa. Accompanied by a large retinue of German bishops and laymen, Henry had come to Canossa to urge Pope Gregory VII to lift the excommunication the pope had imposed on the king the year before. Inside the castle, Gregory was pondering how to react. For more than a generation—as the monk Hildebrand—he had played a key role spurring on a number of like-minded reform popes, and four years earlier, in 1073, he had been chosen as St Peter’s most recent vicar. At his Lent synod in 1075, Gregory seems to have publicly proclaimed a decree forbidding lay investiture of bishops (Cowdrey 1998, 103–4, 546–53). That same year, he authored a set of statements known as Dictatus Papae, which, inter alia, established the pope’s right to depose emperors who did not observe this. Acting on these doctrines, Gregory had in 1076 excommunicated and deposed Henry, thereby triggering what has become known as the Investiture Controversy or, more generally, the medieval ‘crisis of church and state’ (Tierney 1988; Bisson 2009, 8).2

At Canossa, Gregory was seconded by his lay supporter and the owner of the castle, Mathilde, the Margravine of Tuscany—known as la Gran Contessa (‘the Great Countess’)—and by Hugh of Cluny, abbot of the mightiest monastery in the Latin West, the pope’s close confidant but also godfather of King Henry. For three days, Henry remained in the snow outside the gate of the castle, wearing the garments of a penitent. Gregory finally relented, probably encouraged by Abbot Hugh (Cowdrey 1998, 156). Henry was let into the castle,

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1 The German king or ‘King of the Romans’ (König der Römer, Rex Romanorum) could only become emperor when crowned by the pope. In Henry IV’s case, that imperial crowning took place in 1084.
2 The expression is anachronistic as there were no genuine states in the medieval world (and as the term was not used in this way). Moreover, for centuries henceforth medieval men of letters remained loyal to the notion of a universal Christendom, headed by pope and emperor in unison (Oakley 2012, 26; see also Osiander 2007).
the excommunication was rescinded, and the king took communion with the pope.

What was going on at Canossa on those January days in 1077? What had forced the king of Germany, Burgundy, and Italy—the mightiest ruler in the Latin West—to humiliate himself in this way? How had the pope, twenty-five years earlier an appointee of the German emperor, grown strong enough to depose the emperor-elect and ban him from the Catholic community of believers? Why had the reform movement, initially brought to Rome by Henry IV’s father, Henry III, turned on the son? What exactly were Henry and Gregory bickering about? Finally, and most importantly, what were the long-term consequences of these events, which have impressed themselves on the European imagination ever since?

This book addresses these questions. It traces the roots of the confrontation at Canossa to a large-scale breakdown of public authority in the Latin West, which began in the ninth century, and which at one and the same time incentivized and permitted a religious reform movement to radically transform the Catholic Church in the period from the late tenth century onwards. It was this reform movement, initially supported by the strong Salian emperors, which unleashed the crisis of church and state—epitomized by the events at Canossa in 1077—which would dominate European politics for more than two centuries (Oakley 2012, 37; 2015, 4).

We argue that this crisis or conflict was to fundamentally reshape European patterns of state formation and regime change. It did so by consolidating the two great balancing acts European state-builders have been engaged in since the eleventh century: against strong social groups and against each other. The book thus inserts the Catholic Church as the main engine of this double balancing act, which has moulded European state formation for almost a millennium, and which has been singled out as the precondition for the development of the modern territorial state, modern representative democracy, and modern levels of prosperity (Hintze 1975[1931]; Jones 2008[1981]; Hall 1985; Mann 1986; Tilly 1990; Downing 1992; Ertman 1997; Boix 2015; Acemoglu and Robinson 2019; Scheidel 2019; Stasavage 2020).

3 There was nothing humiliating in doing public penance for a medieval ruler. Indeed, there was much venerable precedence for this, among kings of the Old Testament as well as mighty previous emperors such as the Roman Theodosius I and the Carolingian Louis the Pious. What was so damaging was that Henry the year before had declared Gregory deposed as a false monk and made this known to the entire world (Cowdrey 1998, 165–6).

4 A famous example of this is the German imperial chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s remark in the German Bundestag in 1872—in the context of the so-called culture war (Kulturkampf) against segments within the German Catholic Church which resisted the secularization of, for example, education—‘nach Canossa gehen wir nicht’ (‘we shall not walk to Canossa’).
First, we show how the crisis of church and state had ‘internal’ effects on European polities. It set in motion the introduction and formalization of structures of corporate self-government, first within the Church, then—via diffusion, driven by clergy—in towns and regional or realm-level assemblies. It was this process which brought about both what Max Weber termed ‘free’ or self-governing towns and the practices of representation and consent which made up the foundation for medieval parliaments, and which remain the bedrock of modern democracy (Stasavage 2016).

Second, the crisis of church and state had ‘external’ effects. We show how the Catholic Church weakened the imperial idea and put in its place norms about state equality and sovereignty. This paved the way for the European multistate system and for the advent of territorial states such as England and France. It also created a fragmentation of political authority in the Roman Empire of the German Nation which further eased the introduction and consolidation of corporate self-government across Central Europe, as rulers had to rely on negotiation rather than coercion when mobilizing resources for war-making and state-making. In what follows, we first review the literature on European state and regime formation, and then further develop this argument.

**Reviewing the literature on European state formation and regime change**

The study of European state formation and regime change is dominated by the ‘bellicist’ literature focusing on war-making and the endowment literature emphasizing geographical and ecological factors. The bellicist perspective can be traced back to the nineteenth-century notion of the primacy of foreign policy (Das Primat der Aussenpolitik), which dominated the writing of Prussian history back to Leopold von Ranke, the founder of the modern academic study of history (Gerhard 1970; Waltz 1959[1954], 7, 124). It was forcefully defended by the German historian Otto Hintze (1975[1906]) in a...
famous essay (Staatsverfassung und Heeresverfassung) about the relationship between military relations and the character of the state (see also Hintze 1975[1931]). According to Hintze, the European states were moulded in a context of Schieben und Drängen (pushing and shoving), which affected both the form of government and the state apparatus.

The vantage point of the bellicist perspective is thus ‘outside-in’ (Waltz 1979); it emphasizes the external balancing act of the multistate system and its internal repercussions for political power and administrative institutions. The idea that external or geopolitical pressure mattered for state-building and regime change was later picked up by a number of scholars, including Perry Anderson (1974) and Theda Skocpol (1979). But first and foremost we associate it with Charles Tilly’s (1975; 1985; 1990) seminal work on war and state-making, further developed and refined by scholars such as Downing (1992), Ertman (1997), and Hui (2005). Recent contributions to the bellicist literature emphasize how warfare empowered urban groups who were well placed to wrest political autonomy from cash-strapped monarchs. A good example is Dincecco and Onorato’s (2018) ambitious analysis of how warfare facilitated urban population growth and political self-government in Europe in the period 1000–1799.

The endowment literature also has deep historical roots (see Hall 1985; Møller 2017a), but today we mainly trace it back to the seminal work of Stein Rokkan (1975). Here, the argument is that initial geographical and economic endowments allowed certain urban areas to grow, thereby triggering institutional changes that culminated in regime change and state-building (see also Jones 2008[1981]; Tilly 1990; Spruyt 1994; Boix 2015; Wahl 2015; Abramson 2017). Emphasis is thus placed on the internal balancing act created by economically vibrant social groups matching or at least constraining rulers. The most recent example of this research is Abramson and Boix’s (2019, 794) sophisticated attempt to empirically demonstrate how the development of ‘parliamentary checks (in the form of city councils or territorial assemblies with stronger urban participation)’ in Europe between 1200 and 1900 was endogenous to urban economic development, in itself shaped by a specific set of geographic factors (see also Boix 2015). In a similar vein of thinking, Abramson (2017) provides an endowment account of the origins of the territorial state (versus fragmented political authority). Related to this literature, there is the argument that Atlantic trade set northwestern Europe on a more prosperous path and incentivized urban areas to place constraints on the executive (e.g. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2002; Blaydes and Paik 2019).
The bellicist and endowment explanations shed light on many important aspects of European processes of state formation and regime change. They show how warfare and the threat of warfare constantly incentivized rulers and how felicitous endowments created self-reinforcing circles of more accountable political institutions and further economic development, causing some regions to outgrow other regions. But both are wanting in one particular respect: they have little to say about the origins of the external and internal balancing acts that serve as the prime movers of the European experience, including in bellicist and endowment theories. Consider here that other regions of Eurasia—the Byzantine Empire centred on Constantinople, the Middle East with great towns such as Fustat in Egypt and Bagdad in today’s Iraq, Central Asia with cities such as Merv, and Song China with its numerous great cities (Blaydes and Paik 2019)—had much higher levels of urban economic development in AD 1000 or AD 1200 and were also regularly visited by warfare⁶ but did not in the same way come to be characterized by the two great balancing acts that characterize European state formation (Hall 1985; Mann 1986; Goldswijk, Beusen, and Janssen 2010, 568; Bosker, Buringh, and van Zanden 2013, 1424; Stasavage 2016, 152–3; Wickham 2016, 136, 217).

If we focus more specifically on the internal balancing act, we can note how the first wave of formalized self-government, in the form of autonomous town councils, began deep into the eleventh century (Stasavage 2014; Belloc, Drago, and Galbiati 2016), and that a form of de facto self-government seems to have been present in urban communities even earlier (Reynolds 1997[1984], 5, 35–68; 2012[2000]; Fried 2015, 171). According to the dataset we use in this book, sixteen towns introduced autonomous town councils before AD 1100, and a total of 136 before AD 1200. This was well before the urban growth that Boix and Abramson (2019) take as a point of departure,⁷ and according to historians working on medieval Europe, warfare also only intensified around AD 1200 (Ertman 1997, 25–8; Maddicott 2010, 106; Wickham 2016, 212). Moreover, the intensification of warfare after 1200—creating circumstances of ‘generalized geopolitical pressure’—is obviously endogenous to the advent of the multistate system. Hence, the external balancing act requires an explanation that must lie outside of warfare per se (Spruyt 2017).

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⁶ Including wars between the Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire, internecine wars between Muslim rulers, the numerous wars between Song China and northern neighbours such as the Liao and Jin Empires, and the later Mongol invasion of all these areas bar the Byzantine Empire.

⁷ For this reason, Wickham (2015, 8–9), in his book on the origins of urban communes in northern Italy, observes that economic development was not a necessary factor and disregards it.
In sum, while early urban agglomeration and warfare after 1200 might help explain the long-term staying power of the two balancing acts and shed light on the spatial variation in European patterns of state-making, these factors cannot explain the initial emergence of corporate self-government (internal balancing) and the geopolitical pressure of the multistate system (external balancing), and they are not well placed to explain why this double balancing act occurred in the Latin West and not elsewhere.

However, there is a third explanation in the literature which seems better placed to shed light on the origins of these balancing acts. In a series of recent works, David Stasavage (2011; 2016; 2020, chapter 5) has proposed that the character of European state formation—including the emergence of autonomous towns and parliaments—is ultimately due to state weakness. Stasavage’s explanation is premised on a large body of historical research which has documented how the weakening of royal power in particularly the western and central parts of the former Carolingian Empire in the ninth and tenth centuries decentralized and privatized public authority structures (Bisson 2009; Oakley 2010; Wickham 2009, 522–3; 2016, 78–9; Jordan 2001, 52–62).

There is an intuitive plausibility to the notion that this weakening of top-down authority paved the way for urban self-government from below and for generalized geopolitical competition between political units. As medieval historian Chris Wickham (2016, 106, 109) describes, the collapse of public power in West Francia left a ‘cellular structure for politics’, with local lordships and urban and rural communities making up cells of power, ‘which became more formalized in the context of royal weakness’.

However, while the sequence fits in the European case, ‘there had been plenty of periods of weak or chaotic rule in earlier centuries without autonomous lordship developing’ (Wickham 2016, 109), and there are many other regions of the world where weak public authority did not bring about anything similar to the self-governing towns of medieval Europe or the geopolitical pressure of the European multistate system (Hall 1985; Mann 1986; Wickham 2009). In other words, the focus on state collapse does not in itself explain why the ninth- and tenth-century buckling of public authority in the Carolingian realm paved the way for the internal and external balancing acts. In this respect, it begs the same question that the bellicist and endowment literatures do.

Our book addresses this gap. We argue that the key to understanding both the early advent of political self-government and the consolidation of the European multistate system is to be found in ideational and institutional developments within the medieval Catholic Church, which were themselves enabled
by the tenth-century state collapse. In other words, we combine Stasavage’s focus on state collapse with a focus on how the Catholic Church affected the development of political institutions of self-government and geopolitical competition in medieval Europe (Møller 2018a; 2018b; Grzymala-Busse 2020a; 2020b; 2021; Doucette and Møller 2021). Our new explanation makes sense of the timing of self-government and state-building and it also offers a plausible solution to the comparative puzzle, as the crisis of church and state affected the Latin West but none of the other Eurasian areas mentioned earlier.

From this vantage point, state collapse can be seen as an environmental shock that enabled social and political realignments, led by ecclesiastical forces. As Bartlett (1993, 311) puts it, it was the ‘fertile confusion of post-Carolingian Europe’ that allowed the hatching of both the monastic orders and the self-governing towns (see Chapter 3 and 4). The specific form these realignments took in Europe after AD 1000 explains why this particular incident of state collapse was to have long-term consequences for self-government and multistate relations, which we do not find elsewhere.

This unstable situation was—we argue—the backdrop for the state-building processes analysed by the bellicist and endowment literatures. More broadly, it was the precondition for the rational restlessness or lability which Max Weber spent much of his academic life analysing, and which Samuel P. Finer (1997, 1473) would later capture with the following quip: ‘Europe was always travelling but never arrived.’

We thus argue that to more fully understand European development the theoretical perspectives that emphasize ‘lay’ explanatory factors such as warfare, economic development, and state collapse, need to be complemented by work that emphasize ‘religious’ explanatory factors centred on the role of the Catholic Church (see also Osiander 2001b, 120).

**Bringing the church back in**

We are, of course, not the first to highlight how religious beliefs and institutions affected even supposedly secular developments in Europe. As several generations of historians have maintained, separating the religious sphere from the

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*By ‘lay’ explanatory factors, we mean factors which do not emphasize or include religious belief, religious institutions, or religious actors. Lay explanatory factors can be either ideational (e.g. ideology) or material (e.g. economic development). ‘Religious’ explanatory factors can in principle also both emphasize ideational (e.g. religious beliefs) and material (e.g. religious institutions) aspects, but in general lay explanatory factors are relatively more likely to be material, and religious explanatory factors are relatively more likely to be ideational.*
secular sphere is not really meaningful when we analyse political developments in medieval and early modern Europe (Ullmann 1970[1955]; Southern 1970, 15–16, 22; 1992, 274; Tierney 1982; Goody 1984; Mann 1986, chapter 12; Berman 1983; Monahan 1987, 130; Morris 1989, 18, 34; Fichtner 1989; Black 1992; Moore 2000, 168; Kay 2002; Blanning 2007; Watts 2009, 49–50; Wickham 2009; 2016; Oakley 2010; 2012; 2015; Greengrass 2014). Medieval and early modern Europe was a context in which men and women operated within a religious understanding of the social world, even in their political and military dealings, and religious beliefs were constantly invoked to justify and guide political actions (Philpott 2009, 187; Nexon 2009a; see, e.g. Riley-Smith 2005[1987]).

In social science, the seminal treatment of these topics is found in the works of the German sociologist Max Weber and the German historian Otto Hintze. Weber constantly emphasized the role of religion, and it took pride of place in both his ambitious study of world religions and in his more specific analysis of Protestantism and capitalism (Bendix 1962[1946]; Swedberg 1998; Poggi 2006). Others have carried the ‘Weberist’ torch by highlighting the role of religious ideas and institutions for economic development, state-building and regime change (e.g. Hall 1985; Mann 1986). Newer examples include the analyses of state-building by Gorski (2003) and democratization by Woodberry (2012) and the work on sovereignty and the international system by Philpott (2001), Osiander (2007), and Nexon (2009a). We also find a recent ‘Weberist’ body of scholarship by economists which emphasizes the role of religious factors for economic development in Europe (e.g. Kuran 2004; Becker et al. 2016; Andersen et al. 2016; Rubin 2017).

The other great classical contribution to these topics—Otto Hintze’s (1962[1929]; 1962[1930]; 1975[1931]) three rightly famous essays on the development of representative government—was also directly influenced by Weber’s work (Gerhard 1970, 24, 32, 39; Gilbert 1975, 20–2). As we have seen earlier, Hintze emphasized the importance of the geopolitical competition that characterized the European multistate system and which incentivized state-builders to create efficient political and administrative institutions. However, according to Hintze this constant competition was itself a consequence of the competition between state and church. Hintze (1975[1931], 312–17) thus dates the origins of the multistate system to the Investiture Controversy and

* Only after the French Revolution did religion and politics gradually become divorced in Europe, as part of the modernization process that culminated in what Max Weber termed the ‘disenchantment’ of the modern world (see Holmes 1979, 124–5; Philpott 2009).
the Gregorian reforms. More specifically, Hintze argues that the political effects of geopolitical competition, in the form of the creation and spread of representative institutions, were conditional on the presence of the Catholic Church (Hintze 1975[1931], 308). The Church helped spread representative institutions to areas of Latin Christendom where they would not have arisen otherwise, partly as an attempt to secure a political representation of the clergy in the body politic (318, 341; see also P. Anderson 1974).

Hintze’s work clearly shows how an emphasis on the Church can be combined with the bellicist perspective,⁰ and our argument that the crisis of church and state is necessary to understand the external balancing act owes much to his ground-breaking work, just as our work on the Church and the internal balancing act is indebted to the Weberist perspective, as well as to Hintze’s insights about the spread of representative institutions. Our book can also be situated in a new literature which argues that we need to integrate the study of religion into the study of state formation and regime change (Bellin 2008; Nexon 2009a; Grzymala-Busse 2012; Philpott 2009; Woodberry 2012). More specifically, there has recently been a call for bringing the Church back into the study of the European state formation experience (see Møller 2019; Grzymala-Busse 2020a). Indeed, Anna Grzymala-Busse (2021) is currently laying the finishing touches to a book¹¹ with the telling title Sacred Foundations: The Medieval and Religious Roots of European State Formation. We thus see this book as part of a wider effort to push an ‘ecclesiastical perspective’ to the forefront of the vibrant research agenda on European state formation and regime change. Our hope is that readers of this book will in the future factor in the role of the Church when thinking about and analysing these processes.

**Theoretical framework**

Prior research has demonstrated that Catholicism, as all other world religions, has historically ‘shown a remarkable capacity to mutate’ (MacCulloch 2009, 9; see also Oakley 2003; 2015). As the English sociologists John A. Hall (1985, 20) once put it, ‘these belief-systems are loose and baggy monsters, full of saving clauses and alternatives that can be brought out by an interested group

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⁰ Ecclesiastical actors and institutions also repeatedly crop up in the work of Charles Tilly (1975; 1990), Hendrik Spruyt (1994; 2017), and Thomas Ertman (1997; 2005).

¹¹ Grzymala-Busse’s book project has developed in parallel with ours but in the later stages of the work we have benefited from interactions with her project.
when occasion demands.”12 Even contemporaries of the events we analyse in this book sometimes gave expression to this. Take, for instance, English King William Rufus’s dismissive remark—made in defence of favouring royal over ecclesiastical courts—that God’s judgment ‘can be folded this way and that as anyone wants it’ (Moore 1985, 261).

To understand when religion matters for secular social and political development, we therefore focus not on religious doctrines or scripture per se but on the more specific beliefs and interests of religious actors, such as popes, bishops, or monks, or of broader coalitions of religious and lay actors, and on their use of doctrine to achieve distinct goals at different points in time (see also Bellin 2008, 320; Philpott 2009, 193). This does not mean that we slight the importance of religious belief or argue that these beliefs simply served to justify self-interested actions. On the contrary, we emphasize how the church reform movement that began around AD 1000 stimulated a very genuine wave of religious piety and asceticism, first in monastic circles and then spreading to sympathetic laymen, that was translated into action, including military action and the use of force more generally. But we take into consideration that religious beliefs are malleable and that multiple (competing) interpretations of the written word of religious texts are always possible. In the chapters that follow, we will see examples of startling reinterpretations of religious doctrines; indeed, it was such reinterpretations which unleashed the medieval crisis of church and state in the first place.

We make an overarching claim: in a society where men and women operate within a religious understanding of the social world—as was the case in medieval and early modern Europe (Philpott 2009, 187)—there is either a fusion of lay and religious power, or at least one (and probably both) of these parties is in crisis. The first scenario is the kind of symphony or harmony that we find in the Latin West prior to the eleventh century, in the Byzantine Empire throughout its millennium-long existence, and in most historic Islamic polities. This is the normal situation, described by one historian of ideas as ‘the theopolitical commonsense of humankind’ (Oakley 2015, 128), normally reflected in a sacral grounding of lay monarchy. The second and exceptional scenario (Tierney 1988, 1–2), which came to characterize Western and Central Europe from the eleventh century onwards, is an unstable situation or even disequilibrium

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12 This can be illustrated by the way early Church fathers, including Origen and Augustine, developed an ‘allegorical’ method for understanding especially the stories of the Old Testament. For instance, according to Origen, Genesis should not be understood literally. This gave Christianity a great flexibility with respect to incorporating ideas from outside scripture (MacCulloch 2009, 151–2). It was this venerable tradition that Galileo Galilei—ultimately in vain—appealed to when defending his notion that matters of faith and matters of science should be kept separate (Drake 2001, 67–79).