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[History](#), [Middle Ages](#)



Emily Kinghorn Medieval Europe: Jan Vandeburie Word Count: 1, 906 To what extent was the papacy successful in asserting its dominance over the Western Church? The extent to which the papacy asserted dominance over the Western Church has been greatly disputed amongst historians. Certain historians would argue that there is little to suggest that the pope had control from inside other than papal reform to prevent unrest and, would argue that in fact the real conflict was between him and individual states and that he had to deal with multiple reforms and claims that failed. However, there are Historians who would suggest that, in fact, the papacy was successful in asserting its authority over the Western Church due to the religious significance of the Pope's position which on occasions caused individual kings to submit to his power. Furthermore, it can be argued that although the Pope was the figure head of the Church and had power, he had to rely on the support and co-operation of Kings if he was to be able to keep control over the Western Church and therefore it could be said that he was not as dominant as one would think. The Pope is regarded as the successor of Saint Peter, the Apostle, and is the figure head of the Catholic Faith and as part of this role had a great deal of authority in Catholic doctrine. With this position of power the Pope was able to create and annul laws and decrees at will, which would then be followed by individual kings and states. One very important example of this was the Magna Carta created in 1215 which Pope Innocent III publicly condemned. Clanchy states that Innocent used the Magna Carta to highlight his authority as Pope, " To emphasize the authority of papal monarchy Innocent cited the text from Jeremiah. " From this, one can see how being the Pope means that there are certain aspects in which

are automatically under papal control, such as in the case of creating or abolishing laws helping to assure dominance over the church. As well as this, reforms were proof of the papacy's ability as it highlighted how it could freely and at its own accord change aspects of the way the church was ran. For example, the introduction of the papal election not only reinforces that the Pope has control over the church but also increased his authority. Introduced by Gregory VII, the Papal election was reformed meaning that after the Pope dies the Cardinals, " shall afterwards call in to themselves the cardinal clergy; and then the remaining clergy and the people shall approach and consent to the new election, " meaning that the Pope will have the full support and backing of the Cardinals. Reforms of the church not only increased the Papacy's power but also showed its ability to keep the church in line whilst showing how it can evolve whilst remaining dominant. Furthermore, it can be said that the Papacy must be successful in asserting its dominance as according to historians such as R. W. Southern the medieval church was essentially a state, " In the extensive sense the medieval church was a state" as it had all the characteristics of a state such as laws, taxes, and a " great administrative machine" headed by the Pope as its ruler. The control that the church had over the people's lives was total, in that the Papacy controlled every aspect. For example peasants would work for free on church land, and paid 10% of whatever earnings they had for the year to the church itself. This can only be enforced by strict rules and laws, which are followed out by all and also supported by the rulers of states, who then, come under the command of the Papacy. So, to achieve this " state like church", the Papacy must have been strong and dominant, otherwise it

would not have worked effectively. Another way in which the Papacy was successful in asserting its dominance over the Western Church was that the Kings often submitted to its will over affairs, and it is not possible to control states churches without being able to control its King. This can be seen by religious appointments for example that of Stephen Langton who was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1207. Langton, who was elected as Archbishop was disliked by King John who subsequently refused to admit Langton to the country and as said by Chester Jordan, " exiled those bishops and other churchmen who publicly raised their voices in opposition. " This caused a major political debate between John and Innocent III who placed England under interdict with John capitulating later that year. By doing this " Innocent III became John's feudal overlord. " and in return Innocent annulled the Magna Carta declaring it to be " null and void of all validity forever. " By showing weakness and bowing to the power of Innocent III, the Papacy is shown to be successful in asserting dominance over John and there is in control of all decisions about the church that are made in England. However, it can also be seen that on occasions the papacy failed as it did not always successfully assure its dominance over individual states and kings in matters such as church functions, for example the Investiture Controversy which began due to the issuing of the Dictatus papae by Pope Gregory VII. This laid out a set of laws regarding the Popes power over individual churches for example " That he alone can depose or reinstate bishops" and " That the pope may depose the absent. " However, in retaliation Henry IV withdrew his support of the Papacy in a letter sent in 1076 addressing the letter " Hildebrand, at present not pope but false monk. " Pope Gregory VII tried to

retaliate by excommunicating the King however he was unsuccessful in this meeting and was forced to flee after the sacking of Rome by the Normans dying a few years later. Therefore, it can be argued that the Papacy was not always successful in asserting its dominance over the Western Church and that in the example the Pope was humiliated by being forced out of Rome highlighting an overwhelming defeat by Henry IV. As well as this, the Papacy needed the backing of individual kings to avoid schisms that may be caused by anti-popes which was the case for example Innocent III who was rivalled by Anacletus II leaving Western Europe divided “ in a schism that lasted for 8 years. ” By there being the presence of Anti-Pope it means that the actual Pope is not being recognized as an authoritative figure and there is not dominant over the Western Church. The fact that the Pope also needed the support of the Kings means that he was clearly not the all powerful figure that he wanted to be as he could only successfully function as the figure head of the Catholic faith with the support of others. Another key example of this is that of the Western Schism of 1378—1417 in which the papacy had returned to Rome but another pope had been installed in Avignon as if they were trying to extend the Papacy. This is an important example as the disagreement continued even after the deaths of the initial claimants. According to Broderick, there was no “ winner” of this disagreement and was ended “ not by declaring which of the three claimants was the rightful one, but by eliminating all of them by forcing their abdication or deposition. ” Furthermore, this example highlights how some disagreements cannot be won by the Pope who in this instance had to be removed from his position. In the period, the Papacy took steps towards enhance their imperial authority

and asserting their dominance further, for example it can be said that the Pope motivated the Western Church behind a single cause to unite them as one entity. This can be seen Urban II's launching of the crusades in 1095. The crusades were an attempt to liberate the Holy land from the domination of the Muslims, and the Pope gained much support in his decision with Chester Jordan stating that " the pope recognized from the moment that he addressed the crowds in Clermont that he had touched a well-spring of militant devotion. " In a document by Ekkehard of Aurach discussing the first crusade, it is mentioned how all the men are ruled by many leaders, such as " Robert of Lorraine", however ultimately headed by Bishop Hademar who was personally appointed by the Pope. This document shows how the Pope is successful in controlling the Western Church and rallying them into fighting for a worthy cause. This confirmed " the spirit of renewal that had been articulated in the efforts at papal and popular reform, and united the Western Church under the control of the Papacy. To conclude, it can be seen that in this period, whilst the Papacy carried a great deal of authority due to the nature of its position, they were not always successful in maintaining the peace with the Western Church and on occasions engaged in arguments with other leaders. On most occasions the Pope was able to successfully deal with this challenge of power, but this was not always the case for example with the Investiture Controversy ending in the Pope being humiliated and driven out of Rome. Furthermore, as Pope, it was vital to have the support of individual kings and states, otherwise, it was nearly impossible to be able to control and manipulate the church to the papacy's own advantage. Therefore, whilst the Pope was seen as the head of the Medieval Church, he

was reliant on other leaders around him to help him assure his power. It can be argued therefore, that some Popes were more inept at asserting dominance over the Western Church, namely Innocent III, however it also depended on the co-operation of the European States to determine whether a Pope would be able to maintain this dominance.

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