

Pope gregory vii and pope innocent iii: a comparative study essay



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Throughout the central Middle Ages, Europe was characterized by the power struggle between the secular and the ecclesiastic. The question of rule by God or by man was one which arose with unwavering frequency among scholars, clergy, and nobility alike. The line which separated church and state was blurry at best, leading to the development of the Investiture Conflict in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the attempts to undermine the heir to the throne in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Four men stand out among dozens in this effort to define the powers of the lay versus that of the spiritual: Emperor/kings Henry IV and John of England, and the popes who aggressively challenged their exertions of authority, Pope Gregory VII and Pope Innocent III, respectively. The years and conditions through which the worldly battled the holy for the command of the people differed, but the themes and events which emerged amidst the strife bore striking similarities. Alteration of names and faces had no effect on the emotive, and at times bitter, struggle between the two poles of authority; even time could not change the tenuous relationships between the papacy and the secular powers. Pope Gregory VII was born Hildebrand circa 1025 in Sovana, a small town in Tuscany.

“ At an early age, he was sent to Rome—where his uncle served as abbot of the convent of St. Mary on the Aventine—to receive an education. ” He followed Gregory VI into his exile to Germany, continuing his studies in Cologne before ultimately departing for Rome with Pope Leo IX. There, he enthusiastically pursued a clerical life, becoming a subdeacon and steward in the Roman Catholic Church, and later as a legate in France. Over the decades which followed, he garnered the support of the church through his

conduction of negotiations regarding the successor of Leo IX. Pope Stephen X was elected under questionable circumstances, but died shortly after, leading to "the hasty elevation of Bishop Johannes of Velletri, [which] reflected a desperate effort of the Roman aristocracy to recover their influence on the papal throne.

This course of action was dangerous to the Church, as it implied a renewal of the disastrous patrician r?? game; that the crisis was overcome was essentially the work of [Gregory VII]. "Gregory VII gave his support to Pope Nicholas II in lieu of the aristocratic nominee, choosing to favor a leader who was strongly influential on the policy of the Curia during the next two decades. Under this papal rule, the College of Cardinals was granted responsibility for papal elections, thus undermining the power of the nobility of Rome and reducing the influence of the German imperial power on the election.

Nicholas II died, succeeded by Pope Alexander II, and finally, Gregory VII himself. By now, Gregory VII was viewed "in the eyes of his contemporaries as the soul of Curial policy," using them with notable wisdom. He went on to be remembered as one of the great reforming popes, marked in history by his role in the Investiture Contest against Henry IV before his bitter end in exile. Pope Innocent III's rise to command in the Roman Catholic Church was not as dramatic as that of Gregory VII, though it was profound in its own right.

Born Lothar of Segni circa 1160, he was the son of "an important landowner in the Roman Campagna... his mother from the Scotti family [which] had man

connections with the patriciate of the city. " Raised and academically groomed in Rome, he went on to study theology in Paris. There, he was heavily influenced by Peter the Chanter, which shaped Innocent III's outlook: Peter the Chanter " concentrated on practical issues such as preaching and penance, for which moral and sacramental theology was the appropriate intellectual preparation.

" This contrasted with Peter the Chanter's predecessors, who pressed the importance of studying dialectic and Trinitarian theology. Innocent III thus " embodied two of the greatest forces in the medieval church, the Roman nobility and the Paris intelligentsia. " His education was apparent through his deeds and conduct; though no evidence existed that he had formal training as a canonist, he " enjoyed a great reputation for judicial wisdom" and " was a frequent subscriber to papal acts and was active in administration. " His articulation of the mass was exceptional and he wrote a number of surviving texts. In January of 1198, after holding office during the relatively short reigns of four popes and achieving the position of Cardinal Deacon, he succeeded Pope Celestine III.

Innocent III was thirty-seven years of age. The reigns of Gregory VII and Innocent III were remarkably similar in their attempts to exert ecclesiastic power over secular rulers. Gregory's outlook was characterized by his reformist behavior, supporting the notion of challenging the sacred character of kings. " Implicit in the concept of ' lay investiture' was the idea that kings were layman. Yet kings were anointed, and in the eleventh century most people, including ecclesiastics, viewed royal consecration as akin to priestly ordination.

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Gregory intelligently avoided being named a radical, whereby he took a more complicated position: he did not comment directly on the status of kings, but he believed them semi-laymen, placing their rank below that of the minor clerical order and therefore not in a position to elect or invest bishops or other ecclesiastic officials. He articulated his beliefs through a decree, the *Dictatus Papae*, which succinctly and articulately stated his demands of secular kings and emperors, such as the power to depose rulers at will. While this document did not lead to the enforcement of his orders, it did lead to an important turning point in the definition of separation of church and state: it created a hostile relationship with the Henry IV through the 1070s. By 1070, attempts at reform of practices such as simony were not progressing quickly enough, so the powers in Rome turned their attention to a different matter: the control of Episcopal appointments, bringing the papacy into “ direct conflict with temporal rulers. ” Gregory attacked Henry IV’s imperial role by attempting to depose him for nominating an archbishop of Milan.

Henry IV’s reaction was a counterattack, which led to Gregory’s excommunication of Henry IV. Henry IV ultimately threw himself at Gregory’s mercy, pleading for help with his spiritual well-being. Gregory had no choice but to absolve him, as it was his role to aid those seeking salvation.

The peace did not last for long, and Gregory and Henry again came to a head whereby hostile German nobles elected Rudolf of Swabia as the antiking in 1077 just prior to the 1078 general decree against lay investiture. This situation lasted until 1080; the 1078 decree was renewed, and Gregory once again ex-communicated Henry, who by then was involved in battle with the <https://assignbuster.com/pope-gregory-vii-and-pope-innocent-iii-a-comparative-study-essay/>

antiking. In 1080, the antiking passed away and Henry quickly reasserted himself in Germany before going on to invade Italy. As he drew closer to Rome, the College of Cardinals abandoned Gregory and elected a new pope. Gregory died shortly after, in 1085, with the parting words, " I loved justice and I hated inequity, therefore I die in exile. Gregory's struggle with the emperor, like his rise to reign, was singular in its tumult; however, Innocent III faced a dispute of the same nature. An issue arose between Innocent and King John of England which classically embodied confrontation between church and state: the disputed election of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The death of Archbishop Hubert Walter in 1205 led to a delegation of monks in Rome selecting a new choice without consultation of or approval from the King of England. At the time of John's reign there was still a great deal of controversy as to how the Archbishop of Canterbury was to be elected, although it had become traditional that the monarch would appoint a candidate with the approval of the monks of Canterbury. However in the early Thirteenth century, the bishops began to want a say. Not wanting to give the bishops a chance to do this, the monks elected one of their number to the role and John, incensed at his lack of involvement in the proceedings, sent the Bishop of Norwich to Rome as his choice. Innocent solved the situation - albeit temporarily - by dismissing both of the nominees and instead persuading the election of Stephen Langton. Innocent, like Gregory, believed that it was the right of the papal authority to place into power an archbishop - that the king was of semi-lay status and not in a position to trump ecclesiastic authority. John rebelled in the tradition set by Henry, and " refused to admit Langton to England and expelled the monks from

Canterbury. The pope in turn imposed an interdict upon England in March 1208, and John retorted by ordering the confiscation of the possessions of all clergy who refused to celebrate divine service.

" Like Gregory and Henry before them, Innocent and John exchanged argumentative correspondences, which have survived history to reveal the animosity of the struggle. The interdict was strictly enforced, allowing only baptisms and absolutions. This logically should have backfired on the church, but it instead forced John to submit to the church. This is where the similarities between the two events end; Henry found himself triumphant over Gregory, but John succumbed to the ecclesiastic powers. John had found himself facing " hostility in France and dissatisfaction among his own subjects," as well as " signs of a combined front against him by the rebel barons, Stephen Langton, and the French king, who on 8 April 1213 declared his intention of invading England. " While it remains unclear whether Innocent himself was directly involved in this baronial plot, John chose to make peace with Rome.

He accepted Innocent's terms, admitting Stephen Langton and making full financial restitution to the churches. Furthermore, he " issued a charter granting to all cathedral and monastic churches the right of free election, thus at a stroke ensuring that, in theory at least, there would be no repetition of the Canterbury affair. " He ultimately created a close alliance between England and the Holy See, surrendering his territories to the church and granting the pope overlord rights. The situations surrounding the relationships between Gregory and Henry differed from that of Innocent and John, as well as the outcomes. However, the same theme had transcended <https://assignbuster.com/pope-gregory-vii-and-pope-innocent-iii-a-comparative-study-essay/>

the ages: the question of who had the authority to invest the power of God into a man—the church or the king? Perhaps it was Gregory's aggressiveness and Henry's unwavering attitude which led to such a sour outcome for the pope, as opposed to the ultimately submissive nature of John to the well-mannered Innocent.

Regardless, the Investiture Contest did not end with Gregory's death; it recurred again, proving its priority in both the secular and the ecclesiastic concerns.