

Pope joan essay



During the Middle Ages, the Church and the Emperor competed for control of the Holy Roman Empire. The Church and the Emperor ruled jointly over the Holy Roman Empire. Although the Church had a great deal of power, the Emperor was equally as powerful in his own way. Moreover, the powers of Church and the Emperor conflicted with each other. This led to a variety of power struggles. The novel *Pope Joan* by Donna Wolff Cross explores these power struggles and vividly shows how they make life more difficult for people at all levels of society. This is very potent and recurring theme in the novel.

There are many powers that collide with one another in the novel; however, the dominating powers in the Holy Roman Empire are two institutions that oppose each other: the Roman Catholic Church and the Emperor. Both consider themselves in charge. The Church declares itself more powerful than the Emperor, and uses its power to preserve loyalty to the Church and its power over the people. Pope Gregory demonstrates his power by going to the Emperor to end the feud between the Emperor and his sons. This shows that he, as the Pope, has enough power to end wars and disputes with the Emperor.

Pope Gregory comments on his own power as he prays devoutly, "Christ Jesus, give me wisdom I need this day... Show me the way to avert this unholy war and reconcile these rebellious sons to the Emperor their father." (Cross 174) On the contrary, the Emperor arguably does not have as much power as the Pope; however, the Emperor, Lothario, believes he does. "Trust in God, Count Gerald... I'm Heaven's anointed king; He will not fail to grant us victory." (Cross 217) Emperor Lothario believes he is truly connected to

God. Throughout the novel he feels that he should rule over both his kingdom and the Church.

The power struggle between the Pope and the Emperor leads them to try to sabotage each other and increases the misery and suffering of their people. The Emperor tries to acquire more power by having the Pope assassinated while the Pope makes sure the Emperor's power is in check by killing the Emperor's allies. An example of this is the Pope's order to kill Theodore and Leo, two of the Emperor's allies. " Several times they stumbled and almost fell on the tile floor, slippery with blood... The men forced Theodore and Leo to their knees and pulled their heads forward.

One man raised a long sword over Oleo's neck and with one quick stroke, decapitated him. But Threshold's neck was thick... It took three or four sword strokes to cleave his head from his body. " (Cross 44) This shows how the Pope uses assassination to thwart the power of the Emperor. In addition, it shows how in the struggle for power, even those at the top of society are not safe. The Emperor and the Church have different ways to maintain power over their people. These methods of control cause considerable misery for the people. The Church retains its power by threatening the people with Hell in the afterlife.

It stays in power by making the people fear for their soul's eternal damnation and this causes a great deal of spiritual distress. For example, a young boy is despondent as he confesses to Pope Leo about the innocent blood he has shed because he fears for his immortal soul: " I cannot live with what Eve done. Pronounce me my penance ; I will bear any Emperor uses his armies

and weaponry to stay in power. It is the loyalty of the Emperor's army that enables him to do this. The Emperor's troops' are so loyal to him and that they are willing and eager to kill anyone. With a wild shout, a group from the imperial vanguard burst out of formation, spurring their horses into a disorderly run, racing against one another for the glory of being the first to engage the enemy before the eyes of their Emperor. " (Cross 219) The Church and Emperor also use similar methods to keep their power. For example, both punish their people for crimes in similar ways. The Emperor has knights that manage the law and the Pope has church officials that handle the law. Both of their methods of punishment for crimes are similar and harsh.

For instance, in the novel the Emperor's lords boil a man's hand and arm for lying about stealing farm animals. An event similar to this relates to how one of the church officials handles a thief by having his hands cut off, " Benedict screamed as his severed hands dropped to the ground, spurting blood... The swordsman nailed Benedict's severed hands to the side of the she-wolf. " (Cross 297) The Emperor and the Church both keep their power using similar and different methods of control which cause great pain for their people. Although the Emperor does have power, he always needs to assert it to keep the Church's power in check.

Emperor Lothario makes many bold attempts to control the Church. In one instance, when the Church does not go through with a consecration, Emperor Lothario wages full out war on the Church. One of Pope Egregious's informants comes to Lothario and bellows to him, " His soldiers plunder all before them, ransacking the farms, carrying off the livestock, pulling up the vines by their
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roots. They take what they want, and what they do not want, they burn.

Those who get in their way they kill without mercy- women, old men, babes in arms- none are spared.

The horror-" (Cross 273) This action led by Emperor Lothario does not succeed, but it causes many people to suffer and die. Another attempt to decrease the Church's power occurs when Emperor Lothario conspires with Anastasia to make the people supporting the Church pledge their loyalty to the Emperor. " An oath is only words. The people need a Pope who can lead them back to their old ways- to the Frankish Empire, and to you, my liege. "

(Cross 291) The last attempt that Emperor Lothario makes toward the Church is the assassination of the commander of Pope Joan's militia, Gerald: "...

The men abruptly heeled, pulled weapons from the hidden folds of their garments, and came at Gerald. "(Cross 402) In this attempt, the Emperor succeeds, and kills two birds with one stone. The Emperor weakens the militia by killing its gallant, cunning leader and kills the Pope by putting her under a prolonged period of stress. This causes her to have a premature birth and she dies in labor. Emperor Lothario makes many attempts to decrease the power of the Church, and is successful in the end but a considerable personal cost to many. Both the Church and the Emperor dominate the Holy Roman

Empire, but Anastasia who is able to play both sides against each other.

Anastasia has ties with the Church and the Emperor. Anastasia uses both connections to his advantages, which grant him powerful positions among

the two. Because Anastasia knows how politics work, he is able to wrap the Emperor around his finger and earn rewards. " Once Lothario was crowned in his father's place, he would know how to reward Anastasia for the work he had done here. " (Cross 176) Anastasia has helped one day help make him Pope; however, Anastasia never reaches the title of Pope.

Anastasia has power that that accompanies wealth and also possesses the power of persuasion and shrewdness. Anastasia with his intellect is able to earn high positions within the Church which allow him to be an informant to the Emperor. " Soon after Egregious election, Anastasia would be appointed Bishop of Castellated, a perfect position from which to ascend the papal throne after Serious... " (Cross 242) Anastasia also uses his father's influence to persuade his adversaries to vote him Pope. " Before God the priest is lying Surely my countrymen will not believe the word of foreigner over that of a fellow Roman!

Anastasia uses his adversaries to vote for him as Pope, but Joan accuses him of being corrupted. Even though Anastasia never reached Pope, he had power that helped him in the Church and with the Emperor. Anastasia is one of the people in the novel who has power and who is usually discreet about using it. Although there are many different power struggles in the novel between the Church and the Emperor, there are some people who were not able to gain their desired power. One minor character that never regained their power was Jean's father, the Canon. When he lost his position as Canon, he asked his daughter to get him a position in the Church again but he died shortly afterwards. Mimi have lost your position? " [Joan inquired]

Reluctantly, her father nodded. " But Doe violent, I have the strength and skill to do God's work yet. " (Cross 210) One person who never gains their full power over the Church was Anastasia. Anastasia never becomes Pope because Emperor Lothario dies before making him Pope. " Lothario was long dead... " (Cross 407) Another person who never gains full power over the Holy Roman Empire was Lothario. He dies and is never able to control the Church from within with one of his adversaries. .. Having died after a few months of leaving Rome. His throne had gone to his first son Louis II... " We see how these characters are unable to fulfill their destinies because of the viscous competition for power. The novel, Pope Joan, encompasses many different kinds of power struggles. The main power struggle is between the Church and the Emperor. Although both have the same religious views, they have very different views on who is in charge. Pope Joan illustrates the many different forms of power and power struggles found during the medieval era of the Holy Roman Empire.

In addition, the novel shows how these power struggles affect people at all levels of society to varying degrees. Those at the top may suffer death, be disenfranchised or be discredited. Soldiers willingly charge to their deaths in blind devotion to their Emperor. Those at bottom of society may suffer death, disfigurement or cruelty at the hands of unsympathetic soldiers or harsh magistrates. Pope Joan shows how the conflict at the top between the Church and the Emperor permeates down through all levels of society making life during the Middle Ages more difficult for everyone.