

*Building the Ideology of Papal Monarchy Through
Excommunication and Interdict:
A Comparison of Gregory VII and Innocent III*

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Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors
in
History
2003

On the basis of this thesis and of
the written and oral examinations

taken by the candidate on

4/11/03 and on 4/23/03

that the candidate be awarded

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INTRODUCTION

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (Saint Paul, to the Romans, 13:1-2)

The sky hung low in the Middle Ages; God and the eternal were ever-present. For medieval Christians whose lives revolved around religion, the sacraments and offices of the Church were staples of life, and deprivation of those necessities was a calamity. During the High Middle Ages, popes Gregory VII (1073-1085) and Innocent III (1198-1216) both sought to increase their spiritual and political authority over rival kings Henry IV and John I of England through excommunication, a weapon that excluded the monarchs from Christian society. Innocent also exercised his authority by laying England under interdict, which extended the sentence of excommunication to all of John's subjects. Spurred by conflicts over the issue of lay investiture, Gregory and Innocent exerted and legitimized their power with these sentences, which both had the effect of stripping the sovereign of his authority and turning his subjects against him. The justifications for these tactics developed and strengthened the institution of "papal monarchy," which established the pope as the supreme secular and religious leader, at a time when the Church's authority and laws were still developing.

This thesis will examine and compare how excommunication and interdict augmented papal power during the reigns of Gregory VII and Innocent III. Because they used the sentences against strong kings, Gregory and Innocent represent milestones in the evolution of the ideal of papal monarchy. The thesis seeks to understand how the popes threatened and intimidated Henry and John with excommunication and interdict. In what ways did the arguments for these tactics represent new exertions of papal power and steps toward the ideal of papal monarchy? To what extent did Gregory and Innocent rely on Church doctrine, early canon law, and the Bible in

defending their claims for power? Finally, how did each legitimize his excommunication of the monarch who opposed him and assert the papacy as the supreme institution of medieval Europe?

The primary source material consists of letters written by the popes to their rival kings and to bishops of England and the Holy Roman Empire. The letters will be used to reveal the nature of the papal-monarchic relationships, the popes' threats of excommunication and interdict, and their justifications for using the sentences as political weapons. The principle source of Gregory's correspondence is his *Registrum*, which contains some 360 letters.¹ These represent a key-document record because, in every case of a group of letters relating to a single subject, the one given in the *Registrum* invariably marks the development of the case into some new phase. The collection therefore provides a useful outline of Gregory's reform program, characterized by themes of centralization and papal power. Innocent's correspondence is contained in the Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England (1198-1216), which provides the most copious and trustworthy single source on Anglo-papal relations in existence.² The collection is composed of eight registers of 86 letters that were chosen from approximately 3700 to illustrate as many aspects of papal government and diplomacy as possible.³ A large number of them were written to King John and reveal Innocent's view that England was not only a political state in the government of which the pope, as God's vicar, might occasionally intervene. It was also a province of the Latin Church. And because Innocent's power was as great in the sphere of church government as in temporal affairs, there was no facet of English church life in which his control was not felt.⁴

¹ Ephraim Emerton, ed., *The Correspondence of Gregory VII: Selected Letters from the Registrum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

² C.R. Cheney and W.H. Semple, eds., *Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England (1198-1216)* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953).

³ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

The papacies of Gregory and Innocent have not been compared in scholarly literature, though historians have examined each individually. The existing scholarship on Gregory has focused on whether he was a “traditionalist” or an “innovator.” The question is relevant because Gregory often drew upon historical precedent and early canon law in justifying his power to excommunicate a king and establish a papal monarchy. In his article, “The Issue of Law: Conflict of Churches,” Z.N. Brooke depicts Gregory as a revolutionary. Brooke asserts that as long as Church reform had been the chief object of exacting change and the augmentation of papal power through centralization merely the means to that end, there was little conflict between popes and secular rulers.⁵ But Brooke believes that in the investiture controversy, the establishment of papal authority became the chief objective. This represented a sharp break from the past. Reform was pursued not for the sake of spiritual truth, but because it was led by the head of the Church and affirmed papal power. Papal dominance became a reality, and found expression in several different directions—legal and judicial as well as administrative. Brooke argues that Gregory acted as supreme legislator and his decrees bound the whole Church.

In contrast, Robert Louis Wilken’s article, “Gregory VII and the Politics of the Spirit” credits Gregory with a more altruistic and ethereal mission.⁶ Wilken claims that Gregory was dissatisfied with what his predecessors had accomplished, and pursued reform because he wanted to improve the institution of the Church. Instead of looking at Brooke’s evidence of the various temporal roles Gregory assumed, Wilken cites the nature of Gregory’s writings. Specifically, he points to a letter Gregory wrote to Huge, abbot of the monastery at Cluny, that reads,

⁵ Z.N. Brooke. “The Issue of Law: Conflict of Churches” in *The Investiture Controversy: Issues, Ideals, and Results* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 6.

⁶ Robert Louis Wilken, “Gregory VII and the Politics of the Spirit” in *First Things* 89. (January 1999). p. 26-32.

When I review in my mind the regions of the West, whether north or south, I find scarce any bishops who live or who were ordained according to law and who govern Christian people in the love of Christ and not for worldly ambition. And among secular princes I find none who prefer the honor of God to their own or righteousness to gain.⁷

Thus, in Wilken's view, Gregory expanded his power primarily for the glory of God.

Furthermore, Wilken asserts that Gregory knew the customs prevailing in the Church and society of his day had no foundation in ancient Christian tradition. In one of his letters, Gregory wrote, "Christ did not say, 'I am custom,' but 'I am truth'."⁸ Wilken argues that by challenging the practices of his day, Gregory sought to build a bridge over time to the more authentic truths of Christianity, and that such adherence to the past proved Gregory to be a traditionalist at heart. It also legitimized his claims for plenary power.

Scholars have offered various interpretations of the implications of the conflict between Gregory and Henry for the institution of papal monarchy. Some see the resolution at Canossa and the agreement of the Concordat of Worms as a victory for the papacy, while others believe they strengthened lay power. James Bryce's article, "The Papacy Master of the Field," asserts that the events at Canossa, where Henry begged for Gregory's forgiveness for three days in the snow, marked a decisive change in the balance of power and inflicted eternal disgrace on the crown. The Holy Roman Emperor could no longer claim to be the highest power on earth, created by and answerable to God alone. The terms of the Concordat of Worms support this exaltation of papal power. Though it was a compromise designed to spare either party the humiliation of defeat, the Emperor retained only half the rights of investiture that had formerly been his.⁹

On the other hand, Robert Bensen's article, "The Concordat of Worms: A Limited Victory for the Emperor," claims a limited victory for lay power, also using the Concordat of

⁷ Ibid, 29.

⁸ Ibid, 30.

Worms as evidence.¹⁰ Bensen points out that election and consecration were the only two indispensable elements in the making of a bishop, and that the agreement assured Henry of far-reaching authority over both.¹¹ Because elections were to take place at the imperial court, they would inevitably be influenced by the emperor's wishes. He would also get a decisive voice in any disputed election. Moreover, the emperor's investiture was to precede consecration, giving it higher symbolic and actual importance. Finally, Bensen shows that the Concordat was a victory for the emperor due to the number of details it did *not* settle.¹² Like any truce, its main objective was to halt the fighting, not remedy the underlying causes of the conflict. Therefore, it left many problems unresolved. This, in turn, allowed much room for the free play of monarchic power in the future. Strong kings like John of England could take advantage of the ambiguities in the agreement and continue to exert their control over investiture, thereby weakening the institution of papal monarchy.

Because Innocent is best known for calling the Fourth Crusade and the Fourth Lateran Council, while John is usually associated with the Magna Carta, information on their conflict over lay investiture must be gleaned from biographies and general studies on the medieval papacy. Historians have focused on Innocent's view of church-state relations and the struggle between empire and papacy. In *The Medieval Papacy*, Geoffrey Barraclough argues that Innocent asserted a special authority in the Holy Roman Empire, and claimed feudal overlordship over certain kingdoms such as Sicily, Aragon, and Hungary, which had placed themselves under papal protection. However, the basis of this claim was not an abstract, all-embracing doctrine of *plenitudo potestatis*, or plenitude of power, but a carefully defined feudal

⁹ James Bryce, "The Papacy Master of the Field" in *The Investiture Controversy: Issues, Ideals, and Results*, p. 84-91, 89.

¹⁰ Robert L. Bensen, "The Concordat of Worms: A Limited Victory for the Emperor" in *The Investiture Controversy: Issues, Ideals, and Results*, p. 102-111.

prerogative with bishops as his vassals. More generally, Barraclough points out that Innocent claimed the right to interfere in secular affairs where sin might be committed, or *ratione peccati*.¹³ Although this authority left much room for interpretation, Barraclough insists that it was not an outright assertion of universal temporal sovereignty, merely the papal duty to guard against sin.

Joseph Canning, on the other hand, contends in his article, “Power and Pastor: A Reassessment of Innocent III’s Contribution to Political Ideas,” that for Innocent, plenary power was central to the pope’s function.¹⁴ This authority ranged from pastoral duties to jurisdictional functions, and his interference in secular politics weakened the moral legitimacy of the papacy within the Church.¹⁵ Brian Tierney concurs in his article, “Innocent as Judge,” that the papacy’s assertion of temporal power created a “‘destructive tension in medieval Catholicism.’”¹⁶

Canning also identifies a conflicting dualism in medieval history of who was in charge: kings or popes? Because they shared political and spiritual interests, both leaders defended their own perceived rights and took opposing positions. The imperial answer gave the state greater power and confined clerics to religious matters, while the papacy asserted supreme jurisdiction as the prerogative of popes, rendering emperors mere servants of the Church’s will. Canning believes that because neither extreme could succeed, Innocent failed in his goal of becoming lord of the world.¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid, 103.

¹² Ibid. 102.

¹³ Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy* (Norwich: Jarrold and Sons Ltd., 1968), p. 113.

¹⁴ Joseph Canning, “Power and Pastor: A Reassessment of Innocent III’s Contribution to Political Ideas” in *Pope Innocent III and his World* (Ashgate: Hofstra University, 1999), p. 246.

¹⁵ Ibid, 268.

¹⁶ Brian Tierney, “Innocent III as Judge” in *Innocent III* (ed. Powell. 100-1), as cited in Canning, 268.

¹⁷ Canning, 269.

Uta-Renate Blumenthal agrees in The Investiture Controversy that Innocent strove to strengthen papal monarchy, viewing his efforts as an extension of Gregory's ideals. As Blumenthal asserts,

The primatial and quasi-monarchical position of the papacy, intuitively grasped by Gregory VII, developed fully only under his twelfth-century successors, especially under Pope Innocent III, when a vastly expanded bureaucracy with administrative and legal sophistication realized many of the ideas of Gregory VII.¹⁸

This allusion to Innocent's overarching power counters Barraclough's idea of the pope's limited feudal authority, but agrees that Innocent's expansion of power occurred primarily over control of the church, in which the pope had the exclusive right to authorize canonizations and dispose of benefices. But, Barraclough warns that it is easy to exaggerate what this power amounted to in practice. In contrast to Canning's claim that Innocent's secular ambitions curbed his moral authority, Barraclough points to limited material resources that prevented him from enforcing his threats and caused him to lose power in the spiritual realm.¹⁹

However, Barraclough does acknowledge the importance of Innocent's pontificate in the formulation of the theory of papal monarchy. He believes Innocent had an "incisive legal mind" which "set out the papal position with exemplary clarity" and made his decretals famous for their logic.²⁰ But, in practice, he achieved far less than he set out to do. Barraclough concludes that the progress made by Innocent was immense—the position of the pope in the church was entirely altered and something that can be called a papal monarchy had been achieved. However, the foundations of the institution were far weaker than is commonly assumed.²¹

¹⁸ Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Barraclough, 114.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*

In her biography Pope Innocent III, Helena Tillmann expands upon Barraclough's claim that Innocent was weak in temporal affairs by asserting that Innocent did not want to fight the secular power of lay investiture.²² It was not that Innocent was a weak pope, but that the idea of was alien to his thoughts. To shake the dominant position of the nobility within the Church, a revolution of immense dimensions would have been necessary. This also would have disrupted social and political life. The appointment of worthy and suitable men to ecclesiastical offices could be ensured only if these offices ceased to be a catalyst for the attainment of worldly possessions and power.²³ This represents an entirely unrealistic expectation for Innocent to hold in light of the feudal nature of ecclesiastical offices at this time. Thus, Tillman argues that Innocent did not even try to diminish the influence of the nobility in the Church.

Moreover, Tillman asserts that Innocent's precedence over kings was based on his spiritual responsibility alone. She cites the sermon Innocent preached on the day of his consecration, in which he asked himself "who he was...that he was permitted to sit above kings and to possess the throne of glory, for to him was said in the Prophet: 'I have placed you above peoples and kingdoms.'"²⁴ In this sermon, Innocent justified his papal authority on the basis of his spiritual role, claiming no political power whatsoever. Therefore, Tillman believes that Innocent did not assert his temporal power on political grounds. Rather, he promoted conservative ecclesiastical reform and intervened in secular matters only when it was required by his duty to the Church.

In contrast, Christopher R. Cheney focuses on Innocent's use of interdict as a diplomatic weapon in his biography, Innocent III and England.²⁵ Cheney calls the interdict the "most fearful

²² Helena Tillmann, *Pope Innocent III*. (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1980).

²³ Ibid, 210.

²⁴ Ibid, 326-327.

²⁵ Christopher R Cheney, *Pope Innocent III and England* (Germany: Anton Hiersemann, Stuttgart, 1976).

and suicidal weapon of the medieval Church," with political consequences for laity and clergymen alike. Its enforcement produced political counter-measures and provided enemies in and outside of England with a pretext to strike at the king. Cheney asserts that the use of interdict as a punishment demonstrates the inseparability of ecclesiastical and political institutions in the thirteenth century.²⁶ Like excommunication, interdict was used to bring errant rulers into line, and Innocent made extensive use of it. Threats of interdict were even more common. Sometimes a threat succeeded in making the offender submit; other times it was quietly withdrawn on grounds of legal exceptions or political expediency to avoid the risks of imposition.

In sum, scholars argue primarily over whether Gregory and Innocent each exerted a new kind of political authority in building their papal monarchies and whether such power was justified. This thesis, on the other hand, will compare Innocent's view of papal power to Gregory's, focusing on their use of excommunication and interdict. It will study the various arguments they make and maneuvers they employ. Most importantly, it will examine the ways in which the popes promoted and legitimized the institution of papal monarchy in the High Middle Ages, sparking the evolution of the papacy into the powerful force it became.

First, the role of state in Church affairs during the High Middle Ages will be discussed in Chapter One, in conjunction with an examination of the nature of the papal-monarchic relationships in pre-conflict letters. Then, Chapter Two will provide background information on excommunication and interdict, providing a historical framework for analysis of the papal threats to impose these sentences upon Henry and John. Finally, Chapter Three will explore how Gregory and Innocent justified their power to use such weapons against divinely ordained kings and how, in legitimizing their bold actions, they built the ideology of papal monarchy.

²⁶ Ibid, 302.

1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POPE AND KING

The Struggle Between Church and State in the High Middle Ages

During the early Middle Ages, political, business, and even religious affairs of the Church were managed by kings and princes. In fact, interference in the Church's governance was the king's duty because, like the rulers of ancient Israel, medieval kings were anointed at their coronation and invested with a spiritual as well as political mission. As the supreme head of his people, the king appointed bishops and abbots, ruled on religious and liturgical matters, and sometimes even presided over ecclesiastical synods. According to the great Charlemagne, a Germanic king who saw himself as protector and sustainer of the Western Church, it was the king's business to govern and the pope's business to pray.²⁷ However, the distinction was not as clear as he implied; in fact, the papal coronation of Charlemagne as emperor was intended to show that the pope could delegate imperial authority to whom he chose. Such blurring of secular and religious roles, coupled with the struggle for supremacy between pope and king, incited conflict throughout the Middle Ages.²⁸

In northern and western Europe, the Church was organized into regional jurisdictions defined by the territorial authority of a king or prince. Churches were often established by wealthy landowners on their family property. Because he built the church on his own land out of his own funds, the landowner considered it part of his personal property and reserved the right to nominate its priest.²⁹ The practice of lay "investiture" symbolized his authority to do this. The term originally referred to the ceremony in which a lord handed over land to a vassal in exchange for an oath of fealty. The lord would give his new vassal a staff, sword, or spear as a symbol of

²⁷ Wilken, 29.

²⁸ Southern, 99.

the transfer. A similar practice developed for the installation of a bishop. At the consecration, the king or his representative handed to the bishop or abbot the symbols of the office, usually a staff or crozier and a ring, and said, "Receive the church." The bishop was then consecrated in an ecclesiastical rite by other bishops. but because the king had already transmitted the symbols of authority, the system encouraged greater loyalty to the local lord and king than to the pope or Church.³⁰

Thus, a discrepancy existed between the papal theory of Christian society and the realities of the contemporary Church. Papal theory, relying on historical and biblical precedent and dating back to Roman times, envisioned a Christian community led by priests and bishops who gave spiritual direction to lords and kings. In return, secular rulers recognized the supremacy of the papacy.³¹ As successors and representatives of Saint Peter, the first bishop of Rome, popes were granted divine powers by Jesus.³² According to this Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession, the pope had the power to forgive sins in Jesus' name and transform the bread and wine of the Eucharist into His body and blood through transubstantiation.³³ Moreover, papal theory argued that, just as Peter was chief of Christ's apostles, the pope was king of the apostolic Church.³⁴ Because eternal salvation trumped earthly prosperity and priestly power overrode the authority of lords, kings and emperors, secular leaders were subordinate to the pope. According to the ideal of papal monarchy, the Church dominated society and the pope led the Church.

But reality painted a very different picture of mid-eleventh century society. In fact, the affairs of the Church received very little direction from Rome. Without consultation of the pope,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 30.

³¹ Hollister, 225.

³² As recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter. and upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18)

³³ Ibid, 226.

³⁴ Ibid. 225

monasteries and bishoprics were founded: bishops and abbots were appointed by lay rulers; councils were summoned by kings; tithes, ordeals, Sunday observance and penance in local churches were established by bishops and kings; and saints were raised to altars.³⁵ Thus, while the Church played an integral role in society, the pope's authority was secondary to that of the lay ruling class.

Although the system of aristocratic control over the Church proved administratively efficient, it corrupted clerical piety. Monasteries often violated Benedictine rule. Priests kept concubines or supported wives, ignoring the canonical requirement of priestly celibacy.³⁶ Committing "simony,"³⁷ lords often sold bishoprics and abbeys to greedy, undeserving churchmen, who then abused their offices and cheated their tenants and subordinates. For many bishops, their position in the Church meant nothing more to them than an investment. But Rome itself exhibited the most obvious ecclesiastical corruption of the early eleventh century, as Roman nobility took over the papacy and the office became a prize to be won by leading aristocratic families.³⁸

Such an incestuous Church-state relationship proved unacceptable to reformers who sprang up with the surge of lay piety at the beginning of the High Middle Ages. Some responded by joining hermit groups, while others sought action through reform of the Church and the world at large. At the center of the movement stood the papacy. Two bands of reformers emerged during the second half of the eleventh century. The first, the moderate reformers, strove to eliminate simony, enforce clerical celibacy, and improve the morality of churchmen, but did not challenge the Church's alliance with secular leaders. The more extreme group wanted to dissolve

³⁵ R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 96.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Simony was the commerce of ecclesiastical appointments.

³⁸ Ibid.

the tradition of lay control and establish a papal monarchy in which kings deferred to bishops and bishops obeyed the pope. Thus, moderates wanted to purify society while radicals envisioned a supreme spiritual monarchy led by the pope.³⁹

It is commonly assumed that all clergymen supported reform and all lay lords opposed it. However, many secular leaders joined the movement while many bishops resisted it. One of the most active reformers was Emperor Henry III (1039-1056), who used his authority to influence over the politics of Rome to improve the quality of papal leadership. After deposing the corrupt Benedict IX and his two rivals, Henry appointed the first of a series of German-born reform popes.⁴⁰ None of them were radicals, however, and Henry's early death at age 39 provided a chance for the extremists to take charge of the papacy. Leaving behind a six-year-old heir, Henry IV, and a weak regency government, radicals seized the opportunity to expel imperial control of the papacy. At the death of Henry's last papal appointee in 1057, the reform cardinals began electing popes independently and in 1059, with Pope Nicolas II, they issued a "Papal Election Decree" stating that popes would now be chosen by cardinals and that the Holy Roman emperor would only formally approve the candidates.⁴¹ By placing the decision solely in the hands of the senior clergy of Rome, the new rules effectively excluded the emperor or king from controlling the election of the pope. This represented the first step in the Church's move to reduce secular interference in ecclesiastical affairs.

In the midst of the reform movement, an Italian monk named Hildebrand was elected as pope in 1073. Contrary to the stipulations of the decree of 1059, he was chosen amidst the chaos the day after the death of his predecessor Alexander II, with the evident intention of forestalling

³⁹ Ibid, 227.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 228.

⁴¹ Ibid, 230.

imperial action.⁴² Money played a role in the election, so when Hildebrand became Pope Gregory VII, he immediately became guilty of simony.⁴³ Despite his rivals' use of this fact to undermine his legitimacy, Gregory's pontificate became a turning point in the history of the medieval papacy. Imperial approval of papal election was no longer necessary, for Gregory merely informed the emperor of his installation.⁴⁴ As a leader, Gregory lacked intellectual depth but had the ability to take the ideas of his subordinates and compile them into a cohesive, well-defined plan of action. Described by contemporaries as small, ugly, and pot-bellied, he became the most controversial figure of his era. People believed he had psychic powers, and he may have thought this himself. Most importantly, he embraced the ideal of papal monarchy and a Christian commonwealth dominated by the Church.⁴⁵

In 1075, Gregory took the first major step in this direction with his proclamation against lay investiture. Some medieval scholars, such as Barraclough, assert that the decree was actually a weapon against kings who hindered the papacy in the work of reform.⁴⁶ By the time of Gregory's papacy, Henry IV had grown up and a strong ruler. When Gregory tried to enforce his decree by suspending a group of uncooperative, imperially appointed German bishops, Henry responded defiantly, writing a letter that asserted his authority to lead the Church independently as a divinely appointed ruler, without papal interference.⁴⁷ He also challenged Gregory's right to the papacy itself, referring to Gregory's questionable election and addressing him as "Hildebrand, not pope, but false monk."⁴⁸

⁴² Barraclough, 80.

⁴³ Blumenthal, 57.

⁴⁴ Barraclough, 80.

⁴⁵ Hollister, 230.

⁴⁶ Barraclough, 82.

⁴⁷ Barraclough sees the struggle as a conflict of personalities, in that Gregory did not trust Henry to carry through the work of reform, and Henry did not trust Gregory's professions of conciliation (Barraclough, 82).

⁴⁸ Hollister, 231.

Henry's letter therefore defended the traditional social order of divinely ordained kings, sanctified at coronation by the ceremony of holy consecration and anointment and ruling as God's representatives over their subjects and semi-autonomous popes.⁴⁹ Gregory, on the other hand, did not respect the sanctity of secular rulers. He believed, as was commonly accepted in the West, that the pope as a descendant of St. Peter possessed supreme power over the Church and acted as his Vicar. From the earliest days of the Christianity when St. Peter became bishop of Antioch in A.D. 34 then moved his see to Rome in 40, he and his successors led the Church, instituted ceremonies, defined discipline and founded bishoprics.⁵⁰ Based on this tradition of authority, Gregory asserted his power over not only bishops, but kings and emperors, as well. Because disobedience to the pope even in temporal affairs was synonymous with disobedience to St. Peter,⁵¹ Gregory responded to Henry's letter by excommunicating and deposing him, thereby proclaiming his right to determine whether or not a king was fit to rule.⁵²

Meanwhile, aristocratic opposition to the monarchy had been mounting in Germany. Henry had stifled a rebellion in Saxony in 1075 and was trying to regain his father's power when the conflict with Rome began. Gregory's excommunication and deposition spurred German defiance against the centralizing policies of Henry and his predecessors.⁵³ German aristocrats even threatened to elect a new king in Henry's place, despite Germany's tradition of hereditary kingship. Thus, Henry had vastly underestimated the strength of the forces in Germany and Italy that were aligned with the pope against him.⁵⁴ If he wanted to keep his throne, Henry was left with no choice but to beg for Gregory's forgiveness. In January 1077, he crossed the Alps into

⁴⁹ Furthermore, as Barraclough points out, there was good reason to doubt whether a pope's interference in the internal affairs of metropolitans other than Rome was justified by canon law (Barraclough, 82)

⁵⁰ Southern, 94.

⁵¹ Ibid, 95.

⁵² Hollister, 232.

⁵³ Chapter Two will address the issue of excommunication, the history of its use and its ramifications in the eleventh century.

Italy and stood barefoot in the snow before the castle of Canossa where Gregory was staying. Gregory had to decide between his spiritual duty to forgive Henry, the repentant sinner, and his political duty to hold Henry accountable for his adversarial tactics. Finally, after three days, Gregory lifted the excommunication and Henry, in return for regaining the bishops' support through the pope's forgiveness, promised to amend his behavior and returned to Germany to rebuild his authority.⁵⁵

The ideal of papal monarchy was increasingly realized over the course of the next century as canon law developed and canon lawyers legitimized papal supremacy over Christian society. One fact more than any other sums up this period in papal history: that every notable pope from 1159 to 1303 was a lawyer. This explains the concurrent formulation and enforcement of Church law, which strengthened the position of the pope. Because ancient law and government had largely disappeared in Europe at this time, the popes built on the remaining elements of the legal system and claimed greater legislative authority than any other Western rulers.⁵⁶ Papal monarchy reached its pinnacle during the reign of Innocent III (1198-1216), the greatest of the lawyer popes. Characterized as extremely intelligent, pious and a talented preacher by contemporary sources and medieval historians, he not only endorsed the theory of papal monarchy, but also magnified it by engaging in power politics with the leaders of Europe and playing one against another.⁵⁷ Moreover, to combat the growth of popular heresy and secular infringements on ecclesiastical liberty, Innocent used the general interdict to an extent unparalleled by any of his predecessors and laid down some of the first legal provisions regarding it.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Barraclough, 82.

⁵⁵ Hollister, 232.

⁵⁶ Southern, 132.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 239.

⁵⁸ Peter D. Clarke, "Innocent III, Canon Law and Punishment of the Guiltless" in *Pope Innocent III and his World* (Ashgate: Hofstra University, 1999), p. 272.

As the champion of ecclesiastical liberty, one of Innocent's most important jobs was to define the relationship between Church and state, so that, as the Bible states, "'in just distribution be given to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is Gods,' thereby maintaining the liberty of both."⁵⁹ If the Church was not independent of the state, it could not fulfill its spiritual tasks. Two *canones* of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 enumerated the essential claims that Innocent advocated in the name of *libertas ecclesiae*. Canon 25 asserted that "any election taking place under lay pressure is void, that the elect assenting to being thus elected is ineligible in the future, and that the electors are suspended from office."⁶⁰ Canon 46 barred laymen from taxing the clergy and permitted voluntary contributions by clergymen only in special circumstances previously approved by the Roman bishop.⁶¹

The struggle over the right of appointment to ecclesiastical offices was fought most fiercely in England. Before Innocent, the battle against lay control had been waged by officials within the English church rather than by Rome itself. Popes had avoided conflict with English kings because they depended on England as a political ally in struggles against the Empire. Therefore, bishoprics and abbeys continued being filled according to the monarch's will, allowing him to retain his control over the English Church. Innocent did not want to break friendly relations with English kings by violating this "ancient custom," but hoped to promote the Church's independence by defeating it gradually.⁶²

It was during King John's reign (1199-1216) that Innocent first had to settle the issue of double elections in the Angevin realm. There the electors had nominated a rival candidate against the king's, indicating a movement toward Church emancipation. When two candidates

⁵⁹Matthew 22:21, as cited in Tillmann, 79.

⁶⁰ Tillmann, 79.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, 80.

were chosen in the Norman bishopric of Sées in 1202, Innocent cancelled the election of the royal candidate and confirmed the candidate freely elected by the majority. When John refused to acknowledge the elect, Innocent threatened to lay Normandy under interdict,⁶³ expecting that John would not continue the conflict since he needed Rome as an ally in his struggle against Philip of France over his northern French holdings.⁶⁴

In 1205, the first double election in England itself occurred in a monastic cathedral chapter in Winchester. Innocent rejected both the freely elected and royal candidates, claiming election irregularities and intimidation of the electors. A new election was held at the Curia and the outcome was again split. Although the electors eventually chose the royal candidate, this represented an advance against the royal right of appointment because Innocent held John in violation of the terms of Canon 25.⁶⁵

At the beginning of 1206, Innocent learned that in Canterbury, two candidates had been “freely and unanimously” elected to the archiepiscopal see. The monks had elected their subprior and sent him with a delegation to the Curia, but then disavowed the election before King John and requested the royal candidate, Bishop John of Norwich. Innocent met the proposal for the second “freely and unanimously” elected candidate indignantly, chastising the electors for “offering their mother like a whore to different lovers.”⁶⁶ He quashed both elections, and held a new election at the Curia, yielding another split vote. Instead of approving John of Norwich on the basis of that election, Innocent then proposed Cardinal Stephen Langton, possibly as a compromise. Langton was an Englishman whom John had recently congratulated on his promotion to cardinal and considered calling to court. Innocent probably hoped that Langton

⁶³ A full discussion of interdict will be given in a Chapter Two.

⁶⁴ Tillmann, 80.

⁶⁵ Tillmann, 80-81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 81.

would be an acceptable alternative to John for the renunciation of the royal candidate. He therefore urgently solicited John's consent, simultaneously warning him against getting involved in deeper conflicts with Rome.⁶⁷

John's refusal to approve Langton forced Innocent to take the decisive step. In March 1208, three English bishops, acting as papal delegates, published an interdict over England, and at the end of 1209, excommunicated John. At issue during the negotiations preceding these actions had been John's ancient right as a monarch to appoint archbishops. However, John's fight was hopeless from the start, because it soon became clear that the English church would support the pope against the king. Even John's most loyal followers, the bishops of Norwich and Winchester, heeded the interdict, and his chancellor had himself consecrated by Langton when he became bishop of Lincoln, proving the greater strength of Innocent's lordship.⁶⁸

Innocent waited two more years to threaten to unseat John after the publication of the ban. Considering the public support the pope wielded, it was evident that Innocent could depose the king by releasing his subjects from their oaths of allegiance and declaring John an enemy and persecutor of the Church. Innocent told him the king if he did not want peace now, he would not be able to get it later. Repentance after deposition would be in vain.⁶⁹ Thus, by the beginning of June 1213, John was in a difficult position. He faced a baronial conspiracy in England, and rumors were circulating that the pope was about to release vassals of the king from their oaths of fealty. Meanwhile in Europe, a papal, Capetian and Hohenstaufen alliance was emerging.⁷⁰ Therefore, out of fear of the French threat and of his own subjects, John was forced to accept

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 82.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Claire Taylor, "Pope Innocent III, John of England and the Albigensian Crusade (1209-1216)" in *Pope Innocent II and His World* (Ashgate: Hofstra University, 1999), p. 219.

Innocent's ultimatum, surrendering the realms of England and Ireland to the Church. This made John a vassal of the pope, and his former kingdoms nothing more than papal fiefs.

A few days after he received the news of his victory, Innocent announced his future policy regarding the English church. In the document, he commanded the bishops to promote peace with the monarchy. Likewise, Innocent asked John to honor the Church in his realm and grant it liberty, recommending that he yield to archbishops and bishops on matters such as future ecclesiastical appointments. But John had his own agenda, exerting more influence than he was entitled to when executing the papal mandate on subsequent elections. Encouraged by the favor of a papal legate, John again defied the pope by claiming the "ancient custom of the realm."⁷¹ But after the legate was dismissed, John was forced to acknowledge the liberty of elections once more. His royal decree, issued on 12 November 1214, declared the rights of the crown only to permit and consent to elections. Although this restoration of free elections did not cut off all monarchic influence, Innocent's major objective of the dissolution of state control over the Church in England was achieved.⁷²

The Nature of Papal-Monarchic Relations in Pre-Conflict Letters

Before comparing the power struggle between Gregory and Henry to the conflict between Innocent and John, the nature of the relationship that existed between each monarch and pope will be examined. Analysis of pre-conflict correspondence between the leaders will provide a standard of comparison for the subsequent letters in which Gregory and Innocent used excommunication and interdict to increase papal power. Gregory and Innocent's views on

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

kingship will be considered, including what constituted “political matters,” how they perceived royal authority, and how it compared to papal authority.

In the early years of their papacies, the letters from Gregory to Henry and Innocent to John convey confidence in monarchic intentions and in their own power to lead the rulers to righteousness, which meant, in their minds, to obey papal decrees. In a letter written on 7 December 1074, Gregory indicated his belief that Henry was committed to the papal cause of clerical reform and the rooting out of heresy from the empire: “we rejoice greatly that...you are determined to root out completely the heresy of Simony from your kingdom and to use every effort to cure the inveterate disease of clerical unchastity.”⁷³ The letter also implies that Henry confirmed this belief and sought Gregory’s trust by treating papal legates respectfully. The king also sent news to Gregory through them that he had corrected problems in the church that the pope had brought to his attention. Finally, Henry sent Gregory, through the legates, “becoming greetings and assurance of devoted service.”⁷⁴ This royal declaration of devotion to the pope indicated Henry’s personal respect for Gregory and Gregory’s influence over him to rectify ills within the Church.

Likewise, although he lectured John about the sins of the flesh on 27 March 1202, Innocent conceded in the same letter that no man is perfect and praised John for his confession of sin and purity of intention. He wrote, “We rejoice and in the Lord commend the purity of your intention—in that...your Majesty, diligently attending to what we have said, has humbly confessed to the archbishop the sins committed since reaching manhood and, in accordance with his advice, has promised to make amends to God.”⁷⁵ Innocent had received news of John’s confession from Hubert Walter, the archbishop of Canterbury. Through Walter, Innocent

⁷³ Gregory to Henry (7 December 1074), in Emerton, 55.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

commanded that John send English knights to fight in the Fourth Crusade: “The archbishop, desiring to provide for your salvation, has among other things diligently advised and prudently charged you, to send to the aid of the Holy Land a hundred knights who will remain a year in the service of the Crucified.”⁷⁶ There is no record that any such contingent of knights was sent by John to the Holy Land or maintained there by him. In the next few years John needed all the knights he could muster for the defense of his continental lands.⁷⁷ However, this reveals a limit on the extent of Innocent’s power to make John use his army for the Church’s purposes, and therefore, on his influence over the English king. It also foreshadowed the necessity of his use of excommunication and interdict.

Regarding the influence of Henry and John over bishops, Gregory and Innocent viewed the proper exertion of royal power differently. In his letter of 7 December 1074, Gregory asked Henry to use his authority to force the bishops of Bamberg, Strasbourg and Speyer to come to the Apostolic See. The pope wanted them to report clerical conduct so he could push forth reform. Gregory also implied that he found Henry to be more pious in his role as a secular ruler than the clergy in their roles as God’s representatives on earth: “But if—such is the insolence of men—they shall delay in coming—we beg you to compel them by your royal power. And with them we wish you to send confidential messengers who may give us a trustworthy report of their accession and way of life.”⁷⁸ Thus, Gregory trusted Henry to carry out his demands upon the clergy, delegating authority over the bishops to the king. This trust was proven again in September of 1075, when Gregory requested that Henry appoint a new pastor to the church in Bamberg after Bishop Hermann was deposed: “Wherefore we call upon you and command you

⁷⁵ Innocent to John (27 March 1202), in Cheney and Semple, 38.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Cheney and Semple, 37, n. 12.

⁷⁸ Gregory to Henry (7 December 1074), in Emerton, 56.

in the name of St. Peter to see to it that a pastor be appointed to that church in accordance with the divine law."⁷⁹ However, it is significant that Gregory did not empower Henry to rule the clergy freely, but bound the king to the authority of divine law, as laid down by Gregory as pope.

In contrast, Innocent revealed his negative attitude toward John's power over the bishops in his letter of 20 February 1203, when he accused John of abusing the clergy and churches of England since taking the throne and causing them to be dishonorably treated.⁸⁰ The pope berated John for expelling the bishop of Limoge and appropriating the revenues of the church, calling the actions "a shameful thing for [the king] to do." Innocent also chastised him for oppressing and offending the bishop of Poitiers to such an extent that the bishop's church and diocese were almost destroyed.⁸¹ Clearly, Gregory and Innocent viewed the rulers' treatment of and relationship to their bishops differently. Gregory saw the German bishops as insubordinate men who required discipline by Henry's authoritarian hand, while Innocent saw the English bishops as loyal victims of John's power-hungry wiles. Furthermore, Gregory assigned Henry responsibility for the bishops, indicating that he feared Henry's exercise of power over the clergy less than Innocent feared John's, particularly since Innocent believed John had abused that power. The relationship between the kings and their bishops, specifically the degree of allegiance bishops give to their secular rulers, would become highly significant when excommunication and interdict were invoked since the sentences' primary purpose was to sway the clergy's fidelity away from the state and to the Church.

Another difference in the two papal-monarchic relationships lay in the pope's confidence that the monarch would concede to papal directives in affairs of the Church. Writing to Bishop Erlembad of Milan on 9 October 1073, Gregory insisted that he did not feel any ill-will toward

⁷⁹ Gregory to Henry (September 1075), in Emerton, 84.

⁸⁰ Innocent to John (20 February 1203), in Cheney and Semple, 50.

Henry and expressed his belief that Henry would yield to his wishes regarding ecclesiastical issues until Henry's actions proved otherwise. As he wrote, "Against [Henry] we have no hatred, nor ought we to have, unless—which God forbid!—he should choose to act contrary to our holy religion. It is confidently believed that the king will meet our wishes in other affairs of the Church."⁸² Gregory's optimistic tone and attitude can be attributed to the fact that Henry was the papal candidate for king. Also, Gregory had shared a close relationship with Henry's father. Gregory referred to this personal history in a letter to Duke Rudolf of Swabia a month earlier on 1 September 1073: "Wherefore we desire Your Excellency to know that we have no ill will toward King Henry, to whom we are under obligation because he was our choice as king, and because his father of honored memory, the emperor Henry, treated me with especial honor among all the Italians at his court."⁸³ Thus, Gregory believed that Henry's obedience would stem not only from divine authority and the institutional power of the Church, but also from the exertion of Gregory's personal influence over him. When Henry later betrayed the confidence the pope had in him, this intimate connection between them made the defiance even more insulting and further provoked Gregory's infliction of excommunication.

Innocent, on the other hand, rebuked John for his lack of compliance with the papacy in ecclesiastical affairs in a letter written on 20 February 1203. Claiming that his love for John as a son had inspired this reprimand, Innocent expressed serious dismay that John had prevented delegates from trying ecclesiastical cases that Innocent had assigned to them. To Innocent, John's obstruction of such cases hindered papal jurisdiction, or the pope's power over the spiritual realm. The maneuver was even more offensive to Innocent because the pope believed he had always been careful not to infringe upon John's jurisdiction, which he considered the king's

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Gregory to Erlembald of Milan (9 October 1073), in Emerton, 18.

power over the political realm.⁸⁴ Moreover, Innocent asserted that it was unprecedented for a ruler to act with such disregard for papal authority: “but, as it is unheard of for any prince to act in such a manner, a king of your understanding must be well aware how deep was the offence given to the Apostolic See.”⁸⁵ Here Innocent drew on history in criticizing John, claiming that no other prince of the past had treated the pope with such a lack of respect.⁸⁶ Thus, prior to the conflicts over lay investiture, Innocent felt more threatened, and was therefore more enraged, by John’s intrusion on papal power than Gregory was by Henry’s. In fact, Gregory encouraged monarchic intercession in his disputes with the clergy because he viewed Henry as a sort of policeman for him, while Innocent viewed John as part of the cause of clerical corruption.

Gregory and Innocent also held different views on the authority of the monarch over earthly affairs. However, the popes’ involvement in the secular world proved comparable. In two separate letters written before his conflict with Henry, Gregory expressed the belief that God had placed Henry at the summit of human affairs. On 7 December 1074, he wrote, “I will always strive with God’s help to preserve a sacred and merited affection not only towards you whom God has placed at the summit of earthly affairs.”⁸⁷ Then, in September 1075, he addressed Henry as “you whom God has placed at the summit of human affairs.”⁸⁸ In the former letter, he even called Henry’s judgment “divinely inspired.”⁸⁹ However, though he referred to the king’s supremacy on earth and divine inspiration, Gregory made a significant omission in failing to mention any monarchic authority in the spiritual realm.

⁸³ Gregory to Rudolph of Swabia (1 September 1073), in Emerton, 16.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gregory to Henry (7 December 1074), in Emerton, 57.

⁸⁸ Gregory to Henry (September 1075), in Emerton, 83.

⁸⁹ Gregory to Henry (7 December 1074), in Emerton, 58.

In contrast, Innocent found great fault in John's conduct of earthly affairs. Regarding episcopal elections, Innocent accused John of claiming power beyond his rights, applying the revenues of the church to his own purposes, attempting to prevent elections, and forcing electors to choose in accordance with John's own arbitrary decision. These actions shifted the balance of power over the clergy in England from the pope to the king.⁹⁰ John had also ignored papal warnings about keeping the archbishop of Dublin out of royal favor, a transgression Innocent criticized, as well.⁹¹ According to Innocent, John had no right to interfere in ecclesiastical elections or to ostracize a bishop. However, before excommunicating John, Innocent had no way to uphold his claim for plenary power over the clergy.

Despite their opposing positions on the kings' involvement in earthly affairs, Gregory and Innocent both crossed the shady boundary between the secular and the religious themselves, as well. Gregory even made himself the leader of an army when calling a crusade. As he announced, "already fifty thousand men are preparing, if they can have me for their leader and prelate, to take up arms against the enemies of God and push forward even to the sepulcher of the Lord under [His] supreme leadership."⁹² By taking command of an army, even one with a religious mission, Gregory removed himself of the realm of the purely spiritual and confronted the brutality of the secular world firsthand. Moreover, he established himself as not only a Church leader, but also a political figurehead in the empire's greatest military effort. At the same time, he further proved his confidence in Henry's loyalty by entrusting the Church to the king's care while he was away: "For if it shall please God that I go, I shall leave the Roman Church, under God, in your hands to guard her as a holy mother and to defend her for his honor."⁹³

⁹⁰ Innocent to John (20 February 1203), in Cheney and Semple, 50.

⁹¹ Ibid, 51.

⁹² Gregory to Henry (7 December 1074), in Emerton, 57.

⁹³ Ibid, 58.

Innocent was equally absorbed in political affairs before the conflict over lay investiture, although his front was not the battlefield but a struggle between John and Philip of France. On 31 October 1203, Innocent wrote to John with political advice, encouraging him not to wait for a treaty from Philip but to offer it himself.⁹⁴ Here Innocent acted as a diplomatic intermediary, reporting to John that King Philip had alleged John's responsibility for the conflict. According to Innocent, Philip had claimed, "not he, but [John was] responsible for the dispute, and he maintained that [John had] provided both the occasion and the cause of the quarrel."⁹⁵ Innocent also warned John against denying Philip respect and honor, reasoning that Philip was motivated by justice, as well: "for, when the truth of the case is known, we could not withhold from a just cause of his the support which we can afford to any reasonable plea of yours."⁹⁶ Thus, Innocent rendered himself an arbiter in the conflict between Philip and John, as well as an evaluator of justice in political matters.

In sum, Gregory and Innocent had different attitudes toward their political adversaries before engaging in conflict with them. While they both believed in the monarchs' pure intentions at the outset, Gregory had greater confidence that Henry would continue to exert his power over the clergy in a legitimate way. Gregory also showed less concern about Henry's involvement in secular affairs, believing his judgment to be divinely inspired. Innocent, on the other hand, found numerous faults in John's leadership, particularly in matters that affected the Church. However, both popes chose to involve themselves in political affairs, specifically war and diplomacy; Gregory by leading an army on a crusade and Innocent by acting as an intermediary between France and England.

⁹⁴ Innocent to John (31 October 1203), in Cheney and Semple, 62.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 60.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 62.

But, as previously mentioned, it is difficult if not futile to distinguish between political and spiritual realms in the High Middle Ages. They can only be loosely defined as areas in which either the king or the pope exerted greater authority, as recognized by lay people, clergy or the leaders themselves. Thus, when Gregory and Innocent embarked on their quests to augment their power and build papal monarchies, they blurred the lines between the secular and the religious even further by seeking to create an institution that had complete authority over both the Church and the state. The most effective way to accomplish this was to employ weapons that were not abstract, but had real political and social ramifications: the excommunication and the interdict.

2. EXCOMMUNICATION AND INTERDICT: WEAPONS IN THE PAPAL ARSENAL

A Historical Overview of the Sentences

The definitive collection of canonical texts was compiled around 1140 by Gratian, a Bolognese lawyer who became known as the “Father of the Science of Canon Law.”⁹⁷ Originally titled *The Concordance of Discordant Canons*, the work was commonly called the *Decretum*, and represented the first attempt to bring together an immense body of canons from a wide variety of sources and organize them by topic.⁹⁸ In the *Decretum*, Gratian described excommunication as equivalent to “handing a person over to the Devil.”⁹⁹ In fighting with Henry and John over the issue of lay investiture, the most important and powerful weapons Gregory and Innocent held in the papal arsenal were the sentences of excommunication and interdict. The use of these weapons proved major factors in the establishment of an ideology of papal monarchy. Through excommunication and interdict, the popes could not only threaten the monarchs with eternal damnation, but also turn the kings’ subjects against them, rendering the imposition of either a political maneuver as well as a religious punishment. Recalling the history of the sentences will provide a context in which Gregory and Innocent’s individual justifications for such power and how they represented a shift from the past can be compared.¹⁰⁰

Most significantly, excommunication meant exclusion from the community of the faithful. The word combines the Latin roots, *ex* (out of), and *communio* or *communicatio*

⁹⁷ Stephan Kuttner, *Gratian and the Schools of Law, 1140-1234* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1983), p. 12.

⁹⁸ Hollister, 298-299.

⁹⁹ Gratian, *Decretum*, as cited in Richard H. Helmholz, “Excommunication in Twelfth Century England” in *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 11 (1994/95), p. 235.

¹⁰⁰ Although contemporary sources will be used, the modern conception of excommunication and interdict differs little from that of medieval times.

(communion) to mean exclusion from the communion.¹⁰¹ Excommunication was therefore the principle and gravest censure a member of the Christian community could receive, depriving the guilty individual of participation in the common blessings of ecclesiastical society, including public worship, receipt of the Body of Christ, and other sacraments such as ecclesiastical burial.¹⁰² Its purpose, however, was medicinal rather than vindictive, intended not merely to punish the sinner, but more importantly, to correct and return him to the path of righteousness. The sentence was also intended to prevent the repetition of similar acts and required the guilty to do penance for his offense.¹⁰³

According to ecclesiastical law and medieval reasoning, the Church had the right to excommunicate due to its status as a society with the power to ensure its survival by excluding or depriving of their rights and advantages any member that betrays its laws.¹⁰⁴ Confirmation of this justification was found in the New Testament, the example of the Apostles, and the customs or practices of the Church from the early days of Rome to the present.¹⁰⁵ Israel renounced the unfaithful; the Roman state deprived the traitor of fire and water; and the Druids excluded the disobedient from any share in religious ceremony.¹⁰⁶ For the purpose of self-preservation, the early Christian church took similar measures to expel unworthy members. The Gospels legitimized this practice. As the evangelist Matthew wrote, “if he will not hear the church, let

¹⁰¹ A. Boudinhon, *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume V*. (Robert Appleton Company, 1909), as cited in *Excommunication: Its Nature, Historical Development and Effects*. (Francis Edward Hyland, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1928), p. 1. See also the online edition: Knight, Kevin, <http://www.newadvent.org>, 1999.

¹⁰² Boudinhon, online edition.

¹⁰³ Hyland, 2.

¹⁰⁴ S. B. Smith, *Elements of Ecclesiastical Law*, vol. III, *Ecclesiastical Punishments*, 3 ed. (New York, 1888), n. 3161, as cited in Hyland, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Edward B Krehbiel, *The Interdict: Its History and Operation, with Special Attention to the Time of Pope Innocent III, 1198-1216* (Washington: The American Historical Association, 1909), p.4. Hyland also refers to the Druids in his history of excommunication: “Caesar informs us that the inhabitants of Gaul who did not obey the decrees of the Druid priests were excluded from public worship and that among the Gauls this was a very grave punishment.” (p. 12).

him be to thee as the heathen and publican."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, St. Paul regularly excommunicated the incestuous Corinthians¹⁰⁸ and the blasphemers whom he delivered over to Satan.¹⁰⁹

In the first three centuries of the contemporary era, mass conversions brought many half-hearted people into the ranks of the faithful. Correspondingly, the use of excommunication as a protective measure for the Church's integrity grew, especially when imperial persecutors provoked denials of faith from even the most earnest of Christians. In addition to rooting out the unfaithful, the Church used excommunication to protect itself from rampant heresy. As historian Edward Krehbiel comments, "Having no legal status, hence no support from the civil authorities, only one resource was left; she [the Church] must cut off from her privileges, that is excommunicate, the offending individual."¹¹⁰

During this time, excommunication was not considered simply an external measure, but also a punishment of the soul and conscience. It not only severed the outward bond connecting the individual to the Church, but also broke the internal bond with the Christian faith, which extended the earthly sentence into heaven.¹¹¹ After the ninth century, excommunication gradually became a more powerful means of spiritual government and a way for the Church to coerce the following of laws and precepts. It could be threatened or inflicted to secure the observance of fasts and feasts, the payment of tithes, the obedience of inferiors, and the denunciation of the guilty.¹¹² Since at least the third century, it was also used to keep laymen and clerics from associating with excommunicates. In fact, Pope Gelasius I (492-96) discussed the theme so often that his writings form an ideology on excommunicates' contagion.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 18:17, as cited in Hyland, 15.

¹⁰⁸ I Corinthians 5:5, as cited in Hyland, 16.

¹⁰⁹ I Timothy 1:20, as cited in Hyland, 16.

¹¹⁰ Krehbiel, 4.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Elisabeth Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 16.

Apart from rare instances in which excommunication was imposed for a fixed period and then ceased automatically, it could only be removed by absolution. The culprit had the duty to solicit pardon, and it was the responsibility of the ecclesiastical authority to absolve him as soon as he repented.¹¹⁴ Anyone who could excommunicate could also lift excommunication or delegate the power to absolve to another priest or bishop.¹¹⁵

The first recorded case of general excommunication appeared in the fourth century, when the Church began to extend its power with the imperial recognition of Christianity. This censure excluded a whole group of people from the Church in one sentence. The introduction of this new form of punishment indicates that excommunication of individuals had become less effective and experimentation with harsher discipline was necessary. When Christianity became the religion of the Roman state in A.D. 392, the Church's influence further increased and general excommunication became a recognized punishment. According to Krehbiel, "it was a bloodless and effective weapon, and, in so far, one which an organization based upon the teachings of Christ could use."¹¹⁶ Moreover, the decline of Roman law enabled its widespread use.¹¹⁷

Because little distinguished an interdict from general excommunication, exactly when the first interdict was imposed is a matter of debate. Interdict was a censure or prohibition placed on a territory or town that excluded the faithful within that locale from participation in all acts performed by clerics and having reference to worship, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical burial.¹¹⁸ It was less oppressive than general excommunication, however, in that some religious services were permitted, a man was not cut off from association with his fellow men, and the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Krehbiel, 4-5.

¹¹⁷ Because the spirit of Roman law opposes the punishment of the innocent, a censure like general excommunication could not have succeeded while it ruled society. (Krehbiel, 4-5)

¹¹⁸ Boudinhon, online edition.

innocent could be pardoned and freed from injustice after death.¹¹⁹ Excommunication and interdict also differed in purpose. Excommunication was exclusively a censure, intended to coerce a guilty person into repentance, while an interdict could be imposed as either a censure or a vindictive punishment.¹²⁰ The same authorities had the power to lay a province under interdict as to excommunicate, and the sentence was supervised by bishops. Its effectiveness increased with the growth of papal power.¹²¹

Interdict was often used to enforce church mandates, which likened the measure to an administrative order. It had three main objectives: first, to promote the welfare of society; second, to advance either the spiritual or temporal interests of the church; and third, to promote the welfare of the clergy by protecting them from insult or injustice, or by advancing their personal or corporate interests.¹²² The sentence was used most frequently, however, to promote the church's political mission, and gave the church the necessary means of forcing aggressors to come to their terms.¹²³

The pope and bishops had the power to lay interdicts by virtue of their inherent spiritual supremacy. Papal authority to interdict extended over the whole church, and could be exercised by the pope himself or through legates, bishops, chapters, and abbots.¹²⁴ Before laying an interdict, the pope had to observe the processes of monition and citation. One warning was necessary to render the sentence valid, and was prudent because interdict represented a last resort for the church. In giving warning, the pope often indicated how soon the sentence would take effect.¹²⁵ There was no particular formula for the ensuing promulgation of the interdict; the only

¹¹⁹ Krehbiel, 8.

¹²⁰ Boudinhon, online edition.

¹²¹ Krehbiel, 8.

¹²² Krehbiel, 13.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 29.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 20.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 37.

rule was that the form used must be clear and explicit. It also became customary to put the sentence in writing and read it to the guilty party, presumably to avoid confusion.¹²⁶ Finally, the interdict was published, constituting a legal notice.¹²⁷ The duration of each interdict varied, and canon law simply states that an interdict should remain in force until its object is accomplished. The territorial extent of the interdict was limited only by the jurisdiction of the authority promulgating the sentence, and the geographic dispersion depended on the level of the Church's power and political status where the interdict was laid.¹²⁸

But the issuing of an interdict did not always ensure its observance. The Church responded to this problem by appealing first to the religious sensibilities of the people through denying canonical burial. In several cases, the punishment for disregarding this prohibition was the disinterment of bodies. Compliance was also secured through various administrative measures, censure of the clergy, or rewards for obedience. Punishment for non-observance fell most heavily on the clergy, because without their leadership, the services interdict forbade could not be conducted. The three penalties that clergymen faced included suspension, deprivation of benefices, and deposition. However, just as refusal to observe interdict incited punishment, rewards were offered to those that heeded it.¹²⁹

Since the intention of interdict was to force an offender of the Church to repent, he bore the brunt of the sentence. In Krehbiel's words, "even if the offender suffered no more than those around him, indirectly he was the principal sufferer, for it was the expressed design of the interdict to manufacture a public sentiment which should operate against the delinquent in such a

¹²⁶ Ibid, 39.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 40.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 45-48.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 50-54.

way as to bring him into submission.”¹³⁰ The more faithful the parishioners, the more they likely they were to obey the sentence and pressure the guilty individual to repent. If public sentiment was powerful enough to bring cause him to submit, the interdict had been effective.

However, the church could suffer ill effects from an interdict, as well. The offender often resisted with violent counter-measures, and the public, instead of rising against the guilty party, sometimes defied the authority enforcing the punishment. In addition to suffering material losses, the Church and clergy experienced spiritual damages, according to the few records that exist on the subject. But the most damage fell upon the laity, through the loss of allegiance to the Church, the flourishing of heresies and the proliferation of vices. Thus, the mere threat of interdict provided the best option because it did no harm but could achieve the desired ends. Therefore, the Church took advantage of this alternative as often as possible.¹³¹

Thus, whether depriving citizens of their rights as Christians through interdict or undermining the spiritual legitimacy of the king himself through excommunication, both penalties had the effect of stripping the sovereign of his authority and turning his subjects against him. For this reason, Gregory and Innocent found them advantageous in strengthening their papal monarchies. The thesis will next examine exactly how Gregory and Innocent used them to threaten and subdue the kings that opposed them, and how they later justified such actions.

Gregory and Innocent Threaten Excommunication

On either 8 December 1075 or 8 January 1076 (the exact date is unknown), Gregory wrote a letter to Henry ordering the king to comply with the Holy See and its decrees,

¹³⁰ Ibid, 63-64.

¹³¹ Ibid, 65-71.

specifically the edict banning lay investiture.¹³² Henry's failure to do so resulted in his excommunication, which Gregory declared at the Roman Lenten Synod of 14-20 February 1076. Over a century later on 12 January 1209, Innocent wrote to John about the king's failure to approve the appointment of Langton as bishop of Canterbury.¹³³ John's refusal to submit to Innocent's demands also instigated his excommunication three months later. Comparing the papal letters threatening excommunication lends insight into the changes the institution of the papacy underwent between the terms of Gregory and Innocent and shows how each pope used the sentence to exert power over his political adversary.

Gregory began his letter by giving Henry the apostolic benediction (papal blessing), but only on the condition that Henry would obey him as a Christian king should. He wrote, "to King Henry, greeting and the apostolic benediction—but with the understanding that he obeys the Apostolic See as becomes a Christian king."¹³⁴ Although he never specified the correct behavior for a Christian king, Gregory implied that he expected Henry to comply with his decrees. Gregory then admitted that he had hesitated to send Henry the benediction because the king had communicated with men under papal censure of Gregory, recalling the contagion of excommunicates.¹³⁵ Such a lack of consideration for the pope's decrees represented disobedience and behavior incongruent with Gregory's ideal for a Christian king. This action alone was grounds for excommunication. Furthermore, Gregory asserted that Henry could not receive God's favor or Gregory's blessing until he demanded penance from his excommunicated subjects and sought absolution for his own sin. Gregory therefore advised the king to go to

¹³² Gregory to Henry (8 December 1075 or 8 January 1076), in Emerton, 86.

¹³³ Quotation of a letter from Innocent to John sent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (12 January 1209), in Cheney and Semple, 110.

¹³⁴ Gregory to Henry (8 December 1075 or 8 January 1076), in Emerton, 86-87.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

confession immediately and have a bishop send proof that Henry had been absolved. In

Gregory's words:

Wherefore we counsel Your Excellency, if you feel yourself guilty in this matter, to make your own confession at once to some pious bishop who, with our sanction, may impose upon you a penance suited to the offense, may absolve you and with your consent in writing may be free to send us a true report of the manner of your penance.¹³⁶

The "matter" or "offense" Gregory referred to was Henry's contact with excommunicates. This not only indicated Henry's lack of obedience to the pope, but also the weight of the sentence of excommunication, in that even a king could be chastised for dealing with the punished.

From his opening lines, Gregory implicitly demanded Henry's submission. He also revealed his mistrust of the king and his conviction that Henry should feel guilty for disobeying him. By starting his letter in this way, Gregory immediately put Henry on the defensive and threatened the king's standing before God. Furthermore, Gregory implied that even if Henry claimed he had already sought penance, the pope would not believe it until he received written proof of it, in the form of the bishop's report. Such a suggestion implied the instability of the relationship between the two leaders and the lack of trust that now characterized their dealings with one another. This represented an important shift in Gregory's attitude towards Henry. However, Gregory tried to cast his demands in a positive, paternalistic light, advising Henry to submit and confess for their mutual benefit.

Like Gregory, Innocent plunged into the heart of his conflict with John in the opening words of his letter to the king: "On the matter of the church of Canterbury..."¹³⁷ After calling John his "well-beloved son in Christ" and the "illustrious king of the English,"¹³⁸ Innocent quickly stated his grievances. He first expressed his unrealized hope that, since he had given

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Innocent to John (12 January 1209), in Cheney and Semple, 110.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

John special treatment among the princes. John would repay him with respect and honor. This expectation of loyalty due to personal affinity recalls Gregory's confidence that Henry would act particularly loyal to him as a result of their intimate connection. As Innocent wrote, "We had hoped that, arising from the special privilege of affection with which the Apostolic See loved you among all other princes, you on your side would repay it with respect and honor."¹³⁹ Like Gregory, Innocent had believed John would obey his commands and respect the pope as a superior authority. Instead, John had grieved and troubled him by returning hatred for Innocent's love and forfeiting his own honor to impair that of the papacy. Innocent asserted that John had sacrificed his own reputation and chance of salvation to rebel against the orders of the pope, the Church and God. This implied that the pope's and God's wills were aligned. Furthermore, Innocent proclaimed the futility of trying to invalidate papal orders, "since no one can deflect the outstretched hand of the Most High and no one can change what He has decreed."¹⁴⁰ Here Innocent referred to the fact that he, as pope, acted as God's representative on earth. Such a firm belief in his righteousness as God's chosen delegate would later justify Innocent's use of excommunication and interdict.

Thus, at the beginning of his letter, Innocent used many of the same tactics that Gregory employed. He immediately put the king in the defensive position for abusing the special treatment he had been given. He then described the personal pain John's actions had caused him and described how the king had disparaged the image of the papacy. By asserting that John had not only defied his orders, but also those of the Church and of God, Innocent brought the dispute out of the earthly realm. Moreover, with his characterization of John as a rebel, Innocent indicated the more imperial nature of his papacy. In contrast to Gregory's advisory, parental

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Dan. 6:15, as cited in a letter from Innocent to John (12 January 1209), in Cheney and Semple, 110.

tone, Innocent's language was more demanding and threatening. He even put John's salvation at stake. Now the matter was in God's hands and the consequences became eternal.

Innocent used Biblical references from the books of Isaiah and Daniel to support his argument that it was useless to try to change or dispute God's orders as set forth by the pope. Here, his position diverged from Gregory's because Gregory was willing to listen to Henry's suggestions for modification of the papal edict. Addressing the issue of lay investiture, Gregory wrote that he did not want his demands to seem too burdensome or unfair. He therefore allowed Henry to send his own legates to the Apostolic See and to suggest ways to moderate the decree while saving the honor of God, "the eternal king". If Henry could think of a compromise on lay investiture, "the evil practice", Gregory would listen to the idea. As he wrote,

...in order that these demands may not seem to you too burdensome or unfair, we have sent you word by your own liegemen not to be troubled by this reform of an evil practice but to send us prudent and pious legates from your own people. If these can show in any reasonable way how we can moderate the decision of the holy fathers [at the Council] saving the honor of the eternal king and without peril to our own soul, we will condescend to hear their counsel.¹⁴¹

Therefore, Gregory proved more conciliatory and open to dialogue with Henry than Innocent was to John. Gregory's concern for whether Henry thought his orders unjust or oppressive suggests that he considered Henry's opinions and reactions to them, even if he thought he was lowering his own status as the supreme spiritual leader, or "condescending", by doing so. Whether Gregory would have taken Henry's suggestions seriously and been willing to negotiate, however, remains in question because Henry did not engage in dialogue with him, but merely continued to violate papal decrees. Gregory's apparent willingness to compromise also indicates the earlier stage of development of papal monarchy at this time, compared to the position of the institution a century later. Gregory saw the monarchy and the papacy as mutually

¹⁴¹ Gregory to Henry (8 December 1075 or 8 January 1076), in Emerton. 89.

powerful and dependent entities. Thus, maintaining a relationship with Henry was vital to Gregory, while Innocent's relationship with John was less important to the pope. This was partially due to the ability of the papacy to stand alone without the support of the monarchy by Innocent's reign.

However, Gregory did say Henry should have contacted him about his misgivings before directly violating papal decrees. As he wrote, "It would in fact have been the fair thing for you, even if you had not been so graciously admonished, to make reasonable inquiry of us in what respect we had offended you or assailed your honor, before you proceeded to violate the apostolic decrees."¹⁴² This lack of consideration proved how little Henry respected Gregory's admonitions and papal orders, in general: "But how little you cared for our warnings or for doing right was shown by your later actions."¹⁴³

Similarly, Innocent questioned John about his deafness to papal warnings and advice: "Alas! dearly beloved son, what hardness stopped your hearing that you did not catch the salutary warnings we so often impressed upon you? What hardness engrossed your understanding that often you did not observe the wise counsels we suggested to you?"¹⁴⁴ Again expressing his personal connection to John by calling him his "dearly beloved son," Innocent likened the king's disobedience to a physical wound that would spread indefinitely without the help of medicine or the work of a physician. This analogy foreshadows Innocent's use of excommunication to "cure" John and bring him back to his spiritual health. Thus, Innocent preferred to believe that some external but unspecified "hardness" prevented John from hearing his pleas rather than that John consciously rejected them. The pope used the words of a biblical

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (12 January 1209), in Cheney and Semple, 111.

prophet to echo his grievances: “To whom shall we speak, and whom shall we further summon as witness? His ears are uncircumcised and he cannot hear.”¹⁴⁵

The pope refused to believe that John had simply ignored him because Innocent had shown such deference to the English king in the past. Innocent referred to the “extraordinary patience” the Church had exhibited in its dealings with John and the consideration given to John’s wishes in the matter of the church of Canterbury.¹⁴⁶ Innocent conceded that John’s ingratitude could be to blame for his actions, but continued to write about an external hindrance that kept John from cooperating with him. He could not understand John rejection of the redemption offered by the Church for offending God. Innocent therefore expressed pity for the cruelty the king had inflicted upon himself: “we pity you all the more for this great hardness inasmuch as you have turned cruel against yourself and have so far piteously shunned taking pity on yourself.”¹⁴⁷ By emphasizing John’s rejection of his own salvation, Innocent tried to scare him into compliance, asserting John was hurting no one more than himself.

As previously mentioned, Gregory had expected Henry to show more respect and deference to the Church, as well. Calling Henry the “son of the Church” and himself (as a descendant of Peter), the “master of the Church,” Gregory wrote that, “it would have been becoming to you, since you confess yourself to be a son of the Church, to give more respectful attention to the master of the Church.”¹⁴⁸ Through the patriarchal titles of father and son, Gregory revealed the intimate but unequal relationship between pope and king. Also like Innocent, Gregory called on the higher power of God in detecting Henry’s true intentions and deliberating on their conflict. He warned Henry against any “defect of will” toward the papacy in

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 110.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Gregory to Henry (8 December 1075 or 8 January 1076), in Emerton, 87.

his words or actions because God knows a person's true motives. In this way, Gregory tried to intimidate Henry with the force of God. The biblical reference he cited corroborates his argument: "He who heareth you heareth me: and he who despiseth you despiseth me."¹⁴⁹

Gregory interpreted these words to mean: when Henry hears Gregory, he is hearing God, and when Henry despises Gregory, he is despising God. Such authority, an effective trump card and last line of defense for the papal monarchy, was difficult to renounce and indicated the weaker position of the state in countering the pope's claim for power by the time of Gregory's reign.

Thus, although Innocent asserted a more imperial, dictatorial brand of supreme authority, both Gregory and Innocent used the threat of excommunication as a scare tactic to intimidate their rival kings. In their view, the kings had infringed upon papal power and needed to be brought back into the submission the popes had previously perceived. Obedience was necessary to achieve eternal salvation. Gregory and Innocent each saw their commands as aligned with God's, so abusing papal trust meant rejecting God's grace. The sentence of excommunication merely represented a concrete extension of these principles, initiated by Gregory and fully developed by Innocent, which formed the backbone of the institution of papal monarchy. Though the popes had each hoped to secure Henry and John's compliance through the threat of excommunication alone, it soon became clear that action was necessary, forcing them to impose the sentence and later defend their right to do so when the offender was a king. In addition, Innocent used interdict to make John submit, indicating not only the larger arsenal of weapons at the pope's disposal, but also the greater power of his adversary.

¹⁴⁹ Luke 10:16, as cited in a letter from Gregory to Henry (8 December or 8 January 1076), in Emerton, 87.

3. JUSTIFYING SUPREME PAPAL POWER TO THE CLERGY AND THE WORLD

The records of papal correspondence that remain show that Gregory and Innocent both wrote to certain bishops in defense of their actions against Henry and John. On 25 August 1076 and 15 March 1081, Gregory responded to two separate requests from Bishop Hermann of Metz that he justify Henry's excommunication. Despite the four-and-a-half year separation between the letters, Gregory used many of the same arguments. Likewise, on 11 July 1207, 18 or 19 November 1207, and 21 November 1207, Innocent wrote to the bishops of London, Ely and Worcester and to all the bishop-executors of England in defense of his actions toward John. Although he had not yet excommunicated John or imposed interdict at the time of these letters, Innocent argued for his interference in lay investiture and his position on papal and monarchic power.

On 26 May 1207, Innocent attacked John for not consenting to Langton's election and warned the king not to fight against the Church. When John did not concede to his wishes but expelled the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, Innocent ordered the excommunication of the king's agents, Fulk de Cantilupe and Reginald de Cornhill on July 11.¹⁵⁰ With this action, Innocent defended his power to excommunicate bishops as agents of the king and prepared other English bishops for John's future excommunication. Thus, in his first letter to the bishops of London, Ely and Worcester written on August 27, Innocent addressed John's resistance to papal authority. Then, on November 18 or 19, Innocent instructed the bishops of England and Wales to observe the sentence of interdict if necessary and asserted that he would fight for his cause to the death.¹⁵¹ Throughout that winter, the bishops tried to coerce John into confirming Langton as archbishop, but their efforts were in vain. Finally, on 23 March 1208, they pronounced the

¹⁵⁰ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 91, n.1.

interdict. Another letter was issued within two days and addressed to the bishop-executors of the interdict, probably so they could publish it in England.¹⁵² Through analysis of these five letters, the arguments Gregory and Innocent made to legitimize their use of excommunication and interdict can be examined and will reveal how the popes built the ideology of papal monarchy.

Representatives of God and St. Peter

The first justification Gregory and Innocent used in defending their supreme authority was that, as popes, they were God's representatives and carriers of His will. By equating God's will with their own, they asserted that anyone who defied the pope's commands defied God Himself. These arguments recalled their earlier demands for monarchic obedience. Thus, as Gregory reasoned in his first letter to Bishop Hermann, one who resists Church law rejects Christ: "For if a man says he cannot be bound by the ban of the Church, it is evident that he could not be loosed by its authority, and he who shamelessly denies this cuts himself off absolutely from Christ."¹⁵³ Furthermore, Gregory claimed that kings who disobey the pope place their own honor above God's. As he wrote: "When kings and princes of this world set their own dignity and profit higher than God's righteousness and seek their own honor, neglecting the glory of God, you know whose members they are, to whom they give their allegiance."¹⁵⁴ Gregory even went so far as to tell the bishop that such self-righteous rulers join the side of the devil when they oppose the pope: "Just as those who place God above their own wills and obey his commands rather than those of men are members of Christ, so those of whom we spoke are

¹⁵¹ Cheney and Semple, 96, n.2.

¹⁵² Ibid, 97, n.1.

¹⁵³ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 103.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

members of Antichrist.”¹⁵⁵ By equating disobedience of the pope with evil, Gregory established his decrees as the ultimate, inviolable law. This marks a significant change from the compromising, paternalistic attitude he showed Henry at the outset of their relationship, and represents his increased confidence and progress in developing papal monarchy.

Similarly, Innocent used a passage from the Bible to prove that the pope must follow the will of God rather than man. He wrote:

Therefore, although we unfeignedly love the king (with God as our witness we say it) and desire to defer to his honor, yet because it becomes us to defer to God rather than to men¹⁵⁶ ...we earnestly warn and exhort you by apostolic letter, that...you should together approach the king and...respectfully exhort him as king...to submit to wise counsels. thus providing salvation for souls. peace for peoples, honor to God and liberty to the Church.¹⁵⁷

Here Innocent professed his loyalty to John, but stated that the king must consecrate Langton in order to please God, thereby aligning papal goals with what he calls, God’s “honor.” He also cited the sacred ends of peace and ecclesiastical liberty as reasons why the bishops should support him and oppose the king. Moreover, while Gregory used the threat of eternal damnation to wield power over Henry and the clergy, Innocent enticed John and the bishops into obedience with promises of salvation.¹⁵⁸ Later in the same letter, Innocent asserted that the consecration was actually performed by God instead of man, signifying that he equated his actions with those that God would take: “You should also advise him to pay meet reverence and due honor to the archbishop...and recognizing that this thing has been done by God rather than by man, to consent to the divine ordinance with ready approval.”¹⁵⁹ Because his papal decrees upheld God’s will, Innocent expected John to obey them as he would a command from God. Assumption of the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Acts 5:29, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207). in Cheney and Semple, 93.

¹⁵⁷ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple. 93-94.

¹⁵⁸ See *The Threat of Hell; The Promise of Salvation*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 94.

alignment between papal and divine will was not present in Gregory's writings; rather, Gregory had to assert and defend their unity. Thus, Innocent's expectation that the king and clergy would accept his decrees as handed down from God signify growth in the legitimacy of the papacy since Gregory's reign.

In addition to calling himself God's representative, Gregory identified himself as the present-day delegate of St. Peter as his predecessors had done. Regarding his conflict with Henry, he told Bishop Hermann that he hoped Peter would guide him in leading the Church: "would that the blessed Peter himself, who is many times honored and wronged in me as his servant, such as I am, might give the answers!"¹⁶⁰ If Peter spoke to the pope and Gregory commanded with the saint's authority, who could deny the legitimacy of his words? Gregory also supported his position with Peter's biblical instructions to be "prompt to punish every disobedience" and to not, "even take food with such people."¹⁶¹ Gregory used these directions to prove that his excommunication of Henry and his order that the bishops refrain from contact with their king were legitimate.

In his second letter to Hermann, Gregory quoted his predecessor Pope Symmachus discussing the power of popes as descendants of Peter:

What we have said above is thus stated in the decrees of the blessed pope Symmachus—though we have learned it by experience: 'He, that is St. Peter, transmitted to his successors an unfailing endowment of merit together with an inheritance of innocence;' and again: 'For who can doubt that he is holy who is raised to the height of such an office, in which if he is lacking in virtue acquired by his own merits, that which is handed down from his predecessors is sufficient. For either he [Peter] raises men of distinction to bear this burden or he glorifies them after they are raised up.'¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 102.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 103.

¹⁶² Gregory to Hermann of Metz (15 March 1081), in Cheney and Semple, 174.

By citing Symmachus, Gregory proclaimed his own value as a spiritual leader and Peter's successor, and declared himself innocent of any wrongdoing based on the evidence of this succession. Moreover, he asserted that even if he was unworthy of his office before he was consecrated, the virtue he received from his predecessors rendered him infallible. Thus, Gregory deflected any potential arguments against his legitimacy as a leader superior to Henry.

Such identification with Peter did not appear in Innocent's writings to the bishops. This could be due to the fact that the cohesion between Peter and the pope was so widely accepted by Innocent's papacy that he did not have to refer to it to buttress his arguments. Rather, he identified himself as a representative of God, relying on the Bible as evidence.

The Power to Punish, The Duty to Cure

In exerting their supreme authority, Gregory and Innocent both needed to legitimize their power to punish those that defied the Church, even if those resistors were kings. While Gregory specifically justified his right to excommunicate, Innocent asserted his plenary right to punish, in general. This may have been due to the fact that he had not actually excommunicated John, but only John's agents, at the time he wrote the letters under examination. Furthermore, Innocent threatened to impose the most severe of papal sanctions, the interdict, in England and Wales and therefore made more wide-reaching arguments.

Gregory relied on the papal tradition and historical precedent laid down in the writing and actions of the holy fathers to justify his power to excommunicate. Replying to those who believed a king could not be excommunicated, Gregory asserted in his letter to Bishop Hermann of Metz of 25 August 1076 that, although he did not have to respond to such an absurd idea, his

actions did indeed follow canon law. As he wrote, “Now to those who say: ‘A king may not be excommunicated,’ although we are not bound to reply to such a fatuous notion, yet, lest we seem to pass over their foolishness impatiently we will recall them to sound doctrine by directing their attention to the words and acts of the holy fathers.”¹⁶³ In the same letter, Gregory cited numerous other popes who had deposed or excommunicated kings. These included: Pope Zachary who had deposed a Frankish king and released his subjects from their oaths of allegiance; St. Gregory, who had not only excommunicated kings and dukes who opposed him, but also deprived of their royal dignity; and St. Ambrose, who had excommunicated the emperor Theodosius and forbade him even to stand in the room of priests within the Church.¹⁶⁴ Thus, Gregory relied heavily on precedent to legitimize his actions, foreshadowing the increasingly legalistic nature of papal decrees and other writings.

Furthermore, Gregory pointed out that his divine power, articulated by Peter, to tend the flock of Christian believers did not exclude kings. Expressing his indignation at such an assertion, he wrote, “But perhaps people would imagine that God commanded his Church to Peter three times saying, ‘Feed my sheep.’ he made an exception to kings!”¹⁶⁵ Because Peter’s jurisdiction included everyone, Gregory’s did, as well: “Why do they not see, or rather confess with shame that, when God gave to Peter as leader the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth he excepted no one, withheld no one from his power?”¹⁶⁶ Again Gregory cited biblical precedent in arguing for his power over the Holy Roman Emperor, showing disbelief that anyone would question the scope of papal authority.

¹⁶³ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 103.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

In contrast, when Innocent initially threatened to lay England under interdict, he made no reference to canon law, St. Peter or the popes that had taken such action before him; he merely informed the bishops that either John would submit, or England would suffer. On 27 August 1207, Innocent told the bishops of London, Ely and Worcester that if John did not accept Langton, “then laying aside all earthly fear and forbidding any opposition or appeal, you are to publish throughout England the general sentence of Interdict, permitting no ecclesiastical office except the baptism of infants and the confession of the dying to be celebrated there.” The object of this threat was to force John into submission through the pressure he would receive from England’s clergy and laymen who would lose the right to practice and participate in Church offices and sacraments.

Innocent also emphasized to the bishops that they must not only comply with the sanction themselves, but also enforce it among their parishioners: “This sentence you must yourselves fully observe, and by ecclesiastical censure you must cause it to be inviolably observed by all.” The pope declared that if anyone disobeyed his orders, they would be disciplined, possibly with excommunication: “For be assured that, on the incredible chance that any persons shall presume in a rebellious spirit to gainsay it, we shall make certain that their presumption is signally punished.”¹⁶⁷ This represented a caution to clergymen who might perform the sacraments in spite of the interdict and papal orders. Thus, while the threat of interdict might be seen as a sign of weakness in that its imposition posed a great risk to the papacy, Innocent’s confidence in using the sentence indicates the increased power of the papacy since Gregory’s reign. Interdict provided the pope with another weapon to force his rivals into submission, which was necessary in John’s case due to the simultaneous growth of the English monarchy at this time.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 94.

¹⁶⁸ Hollister, 255-257.

Furthermore, Innocent's delegation of power to his bishops to impose interdict signifies the greater administrative authority he claimed over his clergy. However, while Innocent gave the bishops the responsibility to impose the sentence, he reserved the right to punish anyone who violated it. In this way, he asserted his supreme position as a papal monarch. Writing to the nobles of England on 21 November 1208, Innocent proclaimed his sanctioning power by citing Isaiah and claiming that God had strengthened his ability to do so: "Assuredly, our hand is not shortened¹⁶⁹: indeed by God's grace it is extended that, if any man's sins make it heavy against him, it will be able to bring upon him, spiritually and temporally, a crushing weight of punishment."¹⁷⁰ By supporting such dramatic words with a biblical reference, Innocent intimidated the king through threats of both eternal and earthly discipline.

Innocent also legitimized his punishment of John by comparing it to a cure for John's mental and spiritual disease. Referring to Hebrews, he again called himself John's father and attributed his actions to concern for John's health: "because 'a father scourgeth every son whom he receiveth and whom the Lord loveth. He rebuketh and chasteneth,'¹⁷¹ we shall begin to make our hands heavier against him, so that in the end he may be cured by the hand of healing and rise up to render us thanksgiving."¹⁷² Thus Innocent claimed as his primary goal the ultimate purification and salvation of his rival, failing to mention the political issues at stake. He also told the bishops that when John had been cured of his illness and returned to his senses, he would thank them for leading him in the right direction. First Innocent characterized as evil those who encouraged John to defy him and gave assurance that the king would realize and repudiate their devilish plan:

¹⁶⁹ Isa. 59:1, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of England (21 November 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Innocent to the bishops of England (21 November 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 99.

For undoubtedly, when he has taken wiser counsel, whereas others by whose evil prompting his is now led astray he will regard with hatred; and in the same way, when he is finally cured by the physician's treatment, he will realize how difficult in intention were the counsels of sinners that aggravated his mental disease, and the medicines which the Apostolic See in its anxious concern employed to heal him.¹⁷³

Then, through the promise of John's future gratitude if they followed papal commands, and the king's loathing if they did not, Innocent garnered the bishops' support for his cause:

As for us, who act the part of the doctor to him—he will rise up to pay us thanks and will end by praising the efficacy of the medicine which earlier he loathed for its bitterness; and acknowledging with what genuine affection we have loved him, he will admit that, when a loved friend is chastised, the motive is a pious affection, love's blows having this particularity that, the more sharply laid on, the more friendly they are^{174, 175}.

Here, Innocent also justified the harshness of his punishment by attributing it to his great love for the king and his care for John's well being. Continuing his medical metaphor, Innocent likened defiance of the pope to grave disease, discouraging others from following John's lead.

Thus, while Gregory relied primarily on biblical and historical precedent to legitimize his power to punish the king, Innocent chose to focus on the positive outcomes of such punishment: the restoration of John's spiritual health and, consequentially, the health of the English Christian community. This difference in strategy indicates Gregory's need to justify his actions by appealing to tradition, while Innocent could assume that the precedent for punishing a king had already been set. His appeal for support involved convincing the English clergy that he had the best interests of John and his subjects in mind. Thus, canon law and the institution of the papacy had evolved to such an extent by Innocent's term that he could focus on the benefits of his

¹⁷¹ Heb. 12:6, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Worcester, and England (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 94.

¹⁷² Innocent to the bishops of London, Worcester, and England (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 94.

¹⁷³ Innocent to the bishops of England (21 November 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 98.

¹⁷⁴ Prov. 27:6, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of England (21 November 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 98.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

sanctions rather than the historical precedents for them. But Innocent also surpassed tradition by using interdict to exert his power, signifying his greater strength as a papal monarch.

The Threat of Hell; the Promise of Salvation

Gregory and Innocent both claimed that their actions promoted the kings' salvation, saving Henry and John from eternal damnation through excommunication's healing power. Gregory threatened that if the bishops did not comply with the sentence, they would be responsible for forcing the king's soul into hell. As he wrote on 25 August 1076, "if he is accursed who withholds his sword from blood—that is to say, the word of preaching life of the flesh—how much more is he accursed who through fear or favor drives his brother's soul into everlasting perdition!"¹⁷⁶ With these words, Gregory not only cautioned the bishops against disobeying him, but also placed the weight of Henry's salvation on their consciences. Likewise, in his letter of 27 August 1207, Innocent insisted that he had consecrated Langton as archbishop for John's own well being. He wrote that, "because we desire to promote the king's benefit and salvation... we have with our hands consecrated him archbishop."¹⁷⁷ The clergy could hardly argue with such pure and holy motives.

Moreover, Gregory and Innocent each emphasized to the bishops the serious danger, both spiritual and temporal, that Henry and John faced by disobeying the pope. On 15 March 1081, Gregory referred to the Bible to substantiate his threat: "Let kings and princes fear lest the higher they are raised above their fellows in this life, the deeper they may be plunged in everlasting fire.

¹⁷⁶ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 104.

¹⁷⁷ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 93.

Wherefore it is written: 'The mighty shall suffer mighty torments.'¹⁷⁸ Despite such grave effects, Gregory believed that Henry did not fear his punishment. In the same letter to Bishop Hermann of Metz, Gregory surmised that Henry 'feared not to incur the penalty of excommunication by dealing with followers who had been excommunicated for the heresy of Simony nor to draw others into excommunication through their dealings with him.'¹⁷⁹ Gregory was referring to the fact that, since the third century, laymen and clerics had been punished for such contact. Ironically, Gregory was the first to mitigate the law forbidding communication with excommunicated persons. In a council held at Rome in 1079, he excepted their wives, children, servants and subjects, as well as those who were ignorant either of the law or of the fact that a person with whom they held intercourse had been excommunicated.¹⁸⁰ However, the king fit into none of these categories.

On 27 August 1207, Innocent also indicated the consequences John faced if he continued to defy Innocent's (and God's) will: "for he opposes our decisions, or rather God's decisions, and led on by foolish advice he does not hesitate to use methods which may result in his serious peril."¹⁸¹ Instigating God's wrath through the defiance of papal decrees provoked grave danger. As further evidenced by the Bible: "in addition to divine displeasure, unless he comes quickly to his sense, he will incur serious loss: for 'it is hard for him to kick against the pricks'¹⁸²." ¹⁸³ Thus, both Gregory and Innocent simultaneously employed the promise of salvation and threat of hell as scare tactics in their arguments for excommunication.

¹⁷⁸ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (15 March 1081), in Emerton, 173.

¹⁷⁹ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076) in Emerton, 102.

¹⁸⁰ Hyland, 29.

¹⁸¹ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 91.

¹⁸² Acts 9:5, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

¹⁸³ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

Political Jurisdiction and the Corruption of Kings

Asserting monarchic infringement on ecclesiastical liberty as a violation of papal theory, Gregory and Innocent each made a claim for temporal power and degraded the legitimacy of monarchic authority by pointing to the kings' lust for power. However, such a bold attitude and confidence in the greater strength of the institution of the papacy is seen more often in Innocent's writings than in Gregory's. Innocent pressed the claim for political authority further by asserting that papal support of the king was more important than monarchic support of the pope.

On 25 August 1027, Gregory wrote to Bishop Hermann of Metz, asking, "If the Holy Apostolic See, through the princely power divinely bestowed upon it, has jurisdiction over spiritual things, why not also over temporal things?"¹⁸⁴ Gregory used the evidence of the past to prove his assertion that earthly rulers were greedy by nature and innately inferior to religious leaders, twice citing the example of emperor Constantine placing himself below the bishops at the synod of Nicaea. First, he described how Emperor Constantine "chose not the highest, but the lowest seat among the bishops: for he knew that God resists the haughty, but confers grace upon the humble."¹⁸⁵ Then, in the second letter to Bishop Hermann written on 15 March 1081, he again used Constantine to show the inferiority of temporal to religious leaders:

Evidently recognizing this the emperor Constantine the Great...took his place below all the bishops and did not venture to pass any judgment upon them but, even addressing them as gods, felt that they ought not to be subject to his judgment but that he ought to be bound by their decisions.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 103.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁸⁶ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (15 March 1081), in Emerton, 170.

Such a reference to history not only provided Constantine as a model of proper behavior for kings, but also proved that secular leaders were subordinate to bishops as well as the pope. Thus, the example illustrated the ideal of Church's supremacy in relation to the State.

Furthermore, in both letters to Bishop Hermann Gregory insisted that kings such as Henry violated God's will due to their nature and conception. In the first letter, he countered the legitimacy of monarchic power superior in contrast to the holiness of bishops by pointing to the lustful origin of kings as greedy seekers of power. He wrote,

Perchance they imagine that royal dignity is higher than that of bishops; but how great the difference between them is, they may learn from the difference in their origins. The former came from human lust for power; the latter was instituted by divine grace. The former strives after empty glory; the latter aspires even toward heavenly life.¹⁸⁷

Because bishops pursue authority through God's grace and salvation rather than dominance on earth, their leadership is more legitimate. In his second letter to the Bishop of Metz, Gregory again identified kings as faithless rulers who obtained their positions by committing crimes against God and man. He used this rationale to argue for the greater authority of Church leaders, asking, "Who does not know that kings and princes derive their origin from men ignorant of God who raised themselves above their fellows by pride, plunder, treachery, murder...Does anyone doubt that the priests of Christ are to be considered as fathers and masters of kings and princes?"¹⁸⁸ This confidence in the superiority of popes over kings represents a change from Gregory's initial attitude of compromise and toleration. In defending papal power, Gregory becomes bolder in his assertion of papal monarchy and more categorical in his claims for supremacy over time.

By accusing kings of perpetually ruling in their own interest, Gregory also painted himself through contrast as a more legitimate leader:

¹⁸⁷ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 104.

So much for kings and emperors who, swollen with the pride of this world, rule not for God but for themselves...From the beginning of the world to the present day we do not find in all authentic records emperors or kings whose lives were distinguished for virtue and piety as were those of a countless multitude of men who despised the world.¹⁸⁹

According to Gregory's interpretation of history, most of the popes since St. Peter had been holier than kings. He used this assertion to prove the greater worthiness of his authority. Again alluding to history, he wrote:

Wherefore they ought greatly to fear, and they should frequently be reminded that, as we have said, since the beginning of the world and throughout the kingdoms of the earth very few kings of saintly life can be found out of an innumerable multitude, whereas in one single chair of successive bishops—the Roman—from the time of the blessed Apostle Peter nearly a hundred are counted among the holiest men.¹⁹⁰

Thus, Gregory used papal tradition to support the legitimacy of his spiritual and political power over the Holy Roman Emperor.

In his letters to the English bishops, Innocent also asserted his absolute power over anything within the Church's domain, even if politics were involved. He first criticized John for dominating ecclesiastical appointments, which he considered to be under papal jurisdiction, asserting that he had always respected John's political sovereignty. On 27 August 1207, Innocent claimed that, "oblivious of everything, he [John] is trying not only to thwart our jurisdiction but actually to nullify it, though we have endeavored always to protect his jurisdiction."¹⁹¹ Further, he warned John, through his correspondence with the bishops, of other princes who had tried to attack ecclesiastical liberty but failed: "He ought to be reflecting on this—that those princes by divine judgment have almost entirely failed, whereas those who support Holy church in her

¹⁸⁸ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (15 March 1081), in Emerton, 169.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹¹ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

liberty and venerate her with due honor. ever advance from good to better success.”¹⁹² With this admonition, Innocent tried to bolster support for his actions among the bishops, telling them that if they took the king’s side, they would be fighting for a losing cause. According to Innocent, only those who honor the Church prosper. Alluding to the political ramifications of John’s opposition, the pope asserted that, “though we regard the king’s devotion as very necessary to us, he can and ought to consider our favor as not less serviceable, perhaps more serviceable, to himself.”¹⁹³ Thus, Innocent saw papal support as vital to monarchic power, but papal power as viable without monarchic allegiance.

Finally, Innocent used the Bible to address the issue of jurisdiction, claiming that, “there are not only clergy but also laity who are men of such wisdom and devotion that they have both the knowledge and the will to distinguish between the things which should be rendered to Caesar and those which should be rendered to God¹⁹⁴.”¹⁹⁵ Here he implied that he had not overstepped the bounds of God’s domain. Any educated clergy- or layman would see that John should be held accountable for intruding upon that authority over ecclesiastical appointments and the clergy, in general.

Therefore, both Gregory and Innocent relied on history and tradition to prove the greater legitimacy of the papacy as an institution capable of exercising political power. While Gregory argued on the basis of the holiness of popes and the corruption of kings, Innocent touted the absolute power of the pope over Church affairs. Thus, Gregory had to justify papal supremacy over ecclesiastical issues, while Innocent could assume that authority as a starting point to extend

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 91-92.

¹⁹⁴ Acts 9:5, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

¹⁹⁵ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

his realm of power. For Innocent, the papal domain included whatever the current pope said it did. Hence, Innocent's rhetoric rendered the reach of papal monarchy boundless.

Combating Pride

In exceeding their rights as kings and infringing on papal authority, Henry and John also received warnings from Gregory and Innocent about becoming too proud and overextending their power. This echoed Gregory's arguments about the corrupt nature of kings. He cited Saul as an example of a secular ruler who committed the sin of pride by gaining too much power and was therefore cast down in the eyes of God:

Thus Saul, after his period of humility, swollen with pride, ran into excess of power. He was raised in his humility but rejected in his pride, as God bore witness saying:...'I marvel how, when he was little to himself he was great before God, but when he seemed great to himself he was little before God.'¹⁹⁶

With this analogy, Gregory expressed his belief that, because of their corrupt origin and intrinsic inferiority to religious leaders, kings were more apt to become inflated by the power they acquired and want to continue increasing it. This, Gregory asserted, would cause them to lose the favor of God and the Church.

Likewise, Innocent compared John to Uzza who, smitten with the Lord, put his hands out to touch the ark even though he was unworthy of the honor.¹⁹⁷ In staking a claim for Church power, Innocent used this parable to warn the bishops about allowing John to become too arrogant and bold: "let him not presume rashly to put out his hand against ecclesiastical

¹⁹⁶ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (15 March 1081), in Emerton, 174.

¹⁹⁷ Para. 13:10, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

rights."¹⁹⁸ He also cautioned the bishops about advisors who would try to turn John away from the directives of the Church and exploit his ego. Innocent commanded them, as John's clergymen, to urge the king not to "forsake the counsel of the older men,"¹⁹⁹ but to despise as flatterers and expel as corrupters those who encourage him in wickedness and "fatten his head with the oil of the sinner."^{200, 201} By using the language of sin and evil, Innocent characterized John's opposition as unequivocally wrong and convinced the bishops to supply the king with advisors who would be more sympathetic to the pope. Also, in warning the clergymen about the potential for power to corrupt their leaders, Gregory and Innocent both used the terminology of excess and gluttony, cautioning them about the "swelling" and "fattening" influence of pride. Through such language, the popes subordinated earthly to divine power, which could resist becoming too proud.

Finally, Innocent asserted that John should appreciate the power God had already granted him and realize that earthly authority greatly depended on the pope's favor. To the nobles of England on 21 November 1207, Innocent wrote, "rather let him recount the gifts of God who, by His kindness exalting him before kings, has gloriously spread his name and power among the princes of the earth through the favour of the Roman Church."²⁰² By claiming that the king's secular power rested upon papal discretion, Innocent positioned John's authority below his own. This argument proved a central tenet of the ideology of papal monarchy.

¹⁹⁸ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

¹⁹⁹ Para. 10:8, cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

²⁰⁰ Para. 141:5, cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 92.

²⁰¹ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester, in Cheney and Semple, 92.

²⁰² Innocent to the bishops of England (21 November 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 99.

“Ye Cannot Serve Two Masters”²⁰³

Finally, in writing to their bishops, Gregory and Innocent both stressed the impossibility of serving two masters, or being loyal to both the pope and their king. They also asserted that it was in the clergy’s interest to choose allegiance to God, in the person of the pope, over allegiance to man, as represented by the king. First, Gregory promised that he would absolve those who had been excommunicated if they retracted their loyalty to Henry. On 25 August 1076, he wrote to Bishop Hermann. “Meantime, be it known to you, my brother, that, upon receipt of letters from certain of our clerical brethren and political leaders we have given apostolic authority to those bishops to absolve such persons excommunicated by us as have dared cut themselves loose from the king.”²⁰⁴ By offering such a significant reward with tangible effects, Gregory manipulated those he had previously cast out from Christian society to take his side and consent to his power. This tactic also demonstrated the force of excommunication in rallying popular support.

Regarding the king’s absolution, however, Gregory told Hermann that he had forbidden anyone to lift the excommunication until the pope could be sure that the king had actually repented:

But, as to the king himself, we have absolutely forbidden anyone to dare to absolve him until we shall have made certain by competent witnesses of his sincere repentance and reparation; so that at the same time we may determine, if divine grace shall have visited him, in what form we may grant him absolution, to God’s glory and his own salvation.²⁰⁵

Thus, Gregory feared that a bishop would absolve Henry on his own, without papal authorization or the king’s genuine repentance. Here again, Gregory attributed his motives in forbidding such action purely to the glory of God and Henry’s spiritual well being. Yet he reserved the right to

²⁰³ Matt. 6:24.

²⁰⁴ Gregory to Hermann of Metz (25 August 1076), in Emerton, 104.

determine whether Henry had really atoned for his sins, rendering Henry's chance of salvation tentative at best. Since only the pope could grant pardon, Gregory retained ultimate authority and prevented a bishop from undercutting his power.

Gregory also made it impossible for the clergy to remain loyal to both the king and the Church, declaring that anyone in contact with Henry would be excommunicated, as well. He wrote, "There is no need to ask me who are the excommunicated bishops, priests or laymen; since beyond a doubt they are those who are known to be in communication with the excommunicated king Henry—if, indeed, he may be properly called a king."²⁰⁶ Here Gregory implied Henry's lack of efficacy as a king without papal support, foreshadowing Innocent's later assertion that papal support was more essential to a monarch than vice versa. Gregory also challenged Henry's power by telling the clergy that supporting the king over the pope meant putting man before God. As he wrote in the same letter, "They do not hesitate to place the fear and favor of man before the commands of the eternal King nor to expose their king to the wrath of Almighty God by giving him their support."²⁰⁷ Since nothing could inspire such terror in the heart of a medieval Christian as the wrath of God, Gregory effectively forced the clergy to side with him.

In his letter of 27 August 1207, Innocent also used the threat of God's vengeance to intimidate the clergy, ordering them to give their loyalty to God instead of man and insulting those who refused by calling them impotent dogs. He ordered the bishops to "see to it that in discharging this mandate you show yourselves such as may be found to regard God rather than

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 102.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

man. And do not be of those who ‘are dumb dogs and cannot bark’²⁰⁸.²⁰⁹ Further, as previously mentioned, Innocent assigned his bishops the responsibility of saving John from God’s disfavor, as well. He commanded them to:

...regulate your royal attachment to the earthly king so as to never offend the Heavenly King, being upright and loyal men you ought to be on guard to save the king by your faithful advice from a policy which has seemingly planned in enmity to God—that of persecuting our venerable brother, Stephen, archbishop of Canterbury and, through him, the church committed to his charge.²¹⁰

Here Innocent implied that by refusing to consecrate Langton, John had victimized the entire Church in his realm. Only through obedience to Innocent could the bishops avoid incurring God’s outrage, and only through intervention could they save John from the same fate.

Moreover, Innocent expressed his hope that English Christians would not comply with John in his evil actions and defy God by opposing the pope. He proclaimed, “God forbid that the English people, who are truly christian and zealous for the orthodox faith, should in this wicked project follow their earthly king in opposition to the Heavenly King, preferring the corporeal to the spiritual.”²¹¹ Thus, English Christians, who Innocent believed to be devoted to the Church, could not show loyalty to both God and their king; they had to choose. If they did not take God’s side, Innocent commanded that the threat of interdict be carried out. This action, to be taken by the bishops on behalf of the pope, would demonstrate the futility of trying to serve both religious and secular masters. By assuring the bishops of certain punishment should they or anyone else oppose his decree, Innocent defrayed any potential challenges to his power as a papal monarch.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Isa. 56:10, as cited in a letter from Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 95.

²⁰⁹ Innocent to the bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester (27 August 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 95.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid, 92.

²¹² Ibid, 94.

In his letter of 21 November 1205, Innocent also warned the nobles of England about the grave danger they faced if they complied with the king's wishes rather than his own. He asked them.

Do you, therefore, whose loyalty and wisdom should make themselves powerfully felt in the difficulties of the king and kingdom. now at this time of misfortune begin loyally and wisely to combat the king's purpose so as to not let yourselves and the kingdom be drawn into a turmoil from which (and God avert this danger!) there could be no easy escape.²¹³

In this way, Innocent held the nobles. through their devotion to him alone, responsible for the future and health of the church in England. Finally, Innocent appealed not only to their personal interests, but also to the higher ideal of justice in asserting that the nobles should support him rather than John. As he wrote,

It is undoubtedly in your interests. in view of the king's opposition to God, not to support him and, putting the fear of God above that of man...not to fear displeasing him temporarily in the cause of justice—for conduct so upright will not injure you but exciting him to hatred will in time benefit you by winning his love.²¹⁴

Thus, Innocent believed that, through papal and clerical coercion, John would be forced to see the justice of papal supremacy. If he did not, he would sacrifice his eternal salvation. By promising the nobles this optimistic eventuality, Innocent convinced them of the legitimacy of the institution of papal monarchy and the righteousness of defending it through support of papal decisions. He also denied the possibility of the peaceful coexistence of equally powerful papal and political monarchies, arguing for the necessary triumph of the papacy as the holier, more legitimate institution. Thus, in defending their claims for plenary power, Innocent and Gregory both insisting on the impossibility of the clergy serving two masters, pope and king. This represented a significant change from the status quo of the early Middle Ages when the roles of

²¹³ Innocent to the bishops of England (21 November 1207), in Cheney and Semple, 99.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 97-98.

Church and State were so blurred that the domain of one institution could hardly be distinguished from that of the other.

CONCLUSION

Spurred by the conflict over lay investiture, Gregory and Innocent exerted their supreme power over the medieval world by excommunicating divinely ordained kings. Innocent further exercised his authority by imposing an interdict over the realm of England. Because these sentences deprived the punished of membership in the community of Christians and access to the sacraments, they represented the most powerful and concrete political maneuvers Gregory and Innocent could employ. They turned the monarchs' subjects against them and undermined the legitimacy of the rulers themselves. The arguments the popes made to justify such bold assertions of power developed and strengthened the institution of the papacy and the ideology of papal monarchy.

At the beginning of the High Middle Ages, the roles and jurisdictions of Church and State were blurred. The two institutions worked in cooperation and lay rulers controlled many ecclesiastical functions, such as the collection of tithes and the appointing of bishops. This reality conflicted with papal theory. But Gregory's pre-conflict correspondence with Henry reflects his efforts to communicate openly with Henry and maintain good relations between papacy and monarchy. His writings also indicate confidence in the ability of his spiritual leadership to guide Henry in righteousness, which the king confirmed by declaring his loyalty to the pope. For Gregory, "righteousness" meant obedience to papal decrees and commitment to rooting out heresy in the empire. Likewise, although Innocent criticized John for sins the king had committed, he proclaimed trust in John's pure intentions and praised the king's commitment to God. John's later disobedience, however, was foreshadowed when he ignored the pope's request

that he send English knights on the Fourth Crusade, indicating the limits of Innocent's political control over him.

The pre-conflict correspondence reveals differences in Gregory and Innocent's attitudes on the proper exertion of royal power over the clergy. Gregory, for example, commissioned Henry to ensure that his mandates for the clergy were carried out, granting the king authority over his bishops. This delegation of power recalled the close relationship Church and State shared before the Gregorian reform movement and showed that Gregory had not completely eliminated the monarch's involvement in ecclesiastical affairs. Rather, he oversaw Henry's direction of the clergy under the authority of divine law. Innocent, on the other hand, accused John of exploiting the English clergy and abusing his power over them, pointing to the king's misuse of church revenues. This distinction between papal attitudes is significant because a primary goal of excommunication, and later interdict, was to shift the clergy's allegiance away from the monarchs and toward the pope. Because Innocent showed greater indignation at John's abuse of the clergy, he used not only excommunication of the king, but also interdict of England to dilute John's power over them.

Gregory also had greater confidence that Henry would obey papal decrees regarding Church affairs. His optimism can be partially attributed to the fact that Gregory shared a close relationship with Henry's father, giving him had strong personal influence over the king. In contrast, Innocent rebuked John for his lack of compliance with papal mandates on issues such as the obstruction of ecclesiastical cases. The pope's surprise and anger at such monarchic intrusion on papal power indicates that, by Innocent's time, the institution had gained such independence from the monarchy that Innocent expected John to concede to his will.

Though Gregory and Innocent had differing attitudes toward the role of kingship in the secular realm, both popes were equally involved in it. Gregory saw Henry at the summit of human affairs, believing the king's judgment to be divinely inspired, while Innocent found fault in John's management of such affairs. However, each crossed the blurry line into the secular world, Gregory by commanding an army in a crusade and Innocent by engaging in diplomatic maneuvers between John and Philip of France. Such political involvement was inevitable since, in building papal monarchies, Gregory and Innocent sought to create an institution with plenary authority over Church and State alike. To achieve this, they had to unequivocally subdue their monarchic rivals when that ultimate authority was challenged on the issue of lay investiture. The popes did so by imposing excommunication and interdict, sentences with tangible political and social consequences.

Because their purpose was to undermine the legitimacy of monarchic rule, Gregory and Innocent's use of these weapons represented a new exertion of papal power. Excommunication had been imposed in the past, but never upon divinely ordained kings. And Innocent pioneered the use of interdict, exerting his influence over the English clergy. The arguments the popes made to legitimize these sentences heralded a bolder papal attitude. However, in fighting Henry and John, Gregory and Innocent first tried to force their rivals into submission with the threat of the weapons alone, since the risk of lay and clerical opposition loomed large.

Gregory's initial response to Henry's defiance of his proclamation against lay investiture and contact with excommunicates was to withhold the papal blessing and advise the king to go to confession. Gregory argued that defying the pope offended God and expressed disappointment at Henry's failure to live up to the ideal for a Christian king, implicitly demanding Henry's obedience and revealing a lack of trust that would henceforth characterize their dealings.

Likewise, when John disobeyed Innocent's command to consecrate Langton, Innocent asserted that the king had sacrificed his monarchic reputation and chance at salvation by rebelling against God and disparaging the image of the papacy. Thus, both Gregory and Innocent align their positions with God's will in their first responses to the kings' defiance, bringing the conflict into the realm of the eternal.

Gregory, however, remained willing to listen to Henry's arguments against his position and consider Henry's modifications to the papal edict. While Innocent stressed the futility of John's attempts to dispute God's orders as laid down by the pope, Gregory's acquiescence and hesitation to rule without the king's support indicate the earlier stage of development of the papal institution during his reign. In contrast, maintaining a constructive relationship with John proved less important to Innocent, who believed that the monarchy needed the papacy more than the papacy needed it. By Innocent's term in office, the papacy could stand on its own. Nevertheless, both popes had expected the kings to show deference to them at the outset and hoped to secure their future obedience through the threat of excommunication alone.

In addition, Gregory and Innocent each decried the lack of monarchic consideration for papal decrees. Gregory asserted that Henry should have brought the pope his concerns about the proclamation before violating it, and Innocent compared John's disobedience to an ailment that physically prevented him from hearing papal warnings and following Innocent's commands. Neither pope could understand why the monarchs would offend God this way, for they believed that from their mouths came the voice of God. This principle of the pope as God's representative on earth supported Gregory and Innocent's claims for supremacy and led them to their next step: imposition of excommunication and interdict.

Upon being forced to take concrete action, Gregory and Innocent had to defend the legitimacy of the sentences to fellow clergymen, and their arguments formed the basis of the ideology of papal monarchy. First, Gregory drew upon early Christian doctrine and asserted that, as descendents of St. Peter, popes were vicars of God and carriers of his will. In defying the pope, Henry had placed his will and honor above that of God, violating His dignity and even becoming a member of the Antichrist. Likewise, Innocent relied on evidence from the Bible to show that only the pope asserts the will of God and that the clergy must support the pope against the king if they want to achieve eternal salvation.

In defending their power to punish kings, Gregory specifically justified his right to excommunicate a king while Innocent asserted his supreme right to punish in general. Innocent's intention to use of the stronger weapon of interdict accounted for this difference. Gregory primarily used tradition and historical precedent set forth by canon law and other popes to legitimize his power of excommunication, and his writings presaged the increasingly legalistic nature of papal decrees over the next century. Gregory also emphasized that his divine authority extended to kings as well as the laity, citing the Bible as evidence. In contrast, Innocent made no reference to the past in declaring his power to sentence John to excommunication and England to interdict. Rather, he simply ordered the bishops to make John submit or allow England's spiritual health to suffer. In addition, he delegated the power of imposing and enforcing the interdict to the clergy, but retained the right to punish those who ignored his commands. These tactics represent a bolder assertion of papal monarchy than that made by Gregory, which was necessary due to the strength of John as an English monarch.

Gregory and Innocent validated their excommunications by claiming them as "medicinal," designed to care for the kings' souls and promote their eternal salvation. This

argument accentuated the positive effects of the punishment and drew on the papal duty to restore Henry and John to spiritual health. The popes coupled this with a scare tactic applied to both the monarchs and the clergy by emphasizing the dangers for each group in the current situation. Henry and John faced the “mighty torrents” of hell, and the bishops risked excommunication for remaining loyal to their kings.

Gregory and Innocent also both strove to legitimize the widening of their political jurisdiction. Gregory pointed towards the corruption of kings and the lustful nature of secular leadership to prove that the papacy was the greater institution, worthy of complete control over issues such as ecclesiastical appointments. Innocent claimed that the pope had absolute power over everything in the Church’s domain, even when politics were involved. Kings, Gregory and Innocent argued, were far more likely than popes to become prideful and overstep the bounds of their authority, forgetting that their power on earth relied on God’s favor.

Finally, Gregory and Innocent each stressed to the clergy the impossibility of serving two masters, king and pope, insisting that the bishops give their allegiance to God through the pope. Innocent extended this argument by denying the possibility for peaceful coexistence between equally powerful papal and political monarchies. Thus, the holier institution of the papacy must triumph, which required the clergy’s support. This reasoning provided the greatest strength to the ideology of papal monarchy, because without the institutional support of the clergy, the pope was powerless. Through excommunication and interdict, Gregory and Innocent made it impossible for the clergy to remain loyal to both spiritual and secular leaders. Disregarding Paul’s advice to the Romans, Gregory and Innocent forced the faithful to choose the authority with the most control over their lives. The arguments they made for widespread support of excommunication

and interdict defined the ideology of papal monarchy, an authority with plenary power over almost every facet of medieval life.

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