



## The Peak of Papal Power

Political and Ecclesiastical Ascendancy

1

### Introduction

- At the height of the Middle Ages, the papacy will reach its maximum power.
- Many combined factors increased the power of the papacy over time—monasticism, the Crusades, sacramentalism, and Scholasticism.
- The efforts of three popes (and the events that happen in their tenure) will bring the Vatican power to its apex by 1215 under Innocent III.
  - He is the first pope to wear the papal tiara. It was a three tiered crown/hat that had inscribed in Latin, "*Vicarius Filia Dei*," or "Vicar of the Son of God."
  - Innocent said, "*The moon derives her light from the sun, and is in truth inferior to the sun in size and quality, in position and effect. In the same way, the royal power derives its dignity from the Papal authority.*" In other words, the Pope is like the sun and the emperor is like the moon. You can only see the moon because the sun chooses to shine its light on it.
  - He will preside over the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and this marks the peak of Catholic power. The 7 Sacraments became official doctrine. Transubstantiation was confirmed as the sole doctrine for Eucharist.
  - Even the Patriarch of Constantinople was submissive to Innocent III.



2

## Sacraments Revisited

- One cannot properly understand papal power without understanding the sacraments.
  - Baptism, Confirmation, Mass, Confession/Penance, Marriage, Ordination, and Last Rites.
- When a person is born, they are baptized, giving them God's grace by forgiving original sin.
- When the person is older, they are questioned (catechism) and "confirmed."
  - The confirmation recognizes the baptism as effective and allows the person to actively be a Catholic – this is accomplished by the next sacrament.
- As a Catholic, on a weekly basis, you attend "Mass" where you get the Eucharist.
  - Since it was now defined as the actual blood and body of Christ, it was how you received atonement for new sins.
- After Mass, there are four more sacraments, but each person will only get to experience three of them.
- Next is the obligation to confess sins to a clergy member.
  - This is auricular confession. You confess both mortal and venial sins and acting in the place of Christ, the priest forgives the penitent sinner. Sometimes they are assigned rituals to assist in forgiveness (penance).



3

## Sacraments Revisited

- For the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> sacrament, a choice has to be made. If the person feels they have the call of God on them for ministry, they cannot marry, but instead they receive clerical orders (ordination).
  - Now they are qualified to be a priest, nun, or monk.
- If one does not feel the call, then they are required to get married.
  - Marriage is only valid if the two are good Catholics who were married by legitimate clergy.
- The final sacrament is Last Rites, which is pretty much a baptism for the dying or dead.
  - Water is sprinkled just before or after death accompanied by a prescribed prayer. This is supposed to forgive remaining sins.
- If a Catholic stops receiving the sacraments, he no longer has grace since he needs grace continuously.
  - Since the RCC is the sole institution into which God invested His grace, and such grace is the 7 sacraments, without the RCC no one can have grace.
  - It gives teeth to Cyprian's comment, "No one can say they have God as their Father if they do not know the Church as their Mother."



4

## Three Tools of Papal Power

- This then makes sense out of the Pope's three tools that will be used to gain increasing power over Catholic Europe.
  - If the Pope says a person is not worthy to receive these sacraments, then they effectively cut a person off from grace and salvation.
  - Notice all 7 sacraments require a priest – baptism, confirmation, Mass, confession, ordination, marriage, and Last Rites. Since priests and Popes had the power to shut people from the grace of God via the sacraments, the sacraments increased the perceived power of the papacy massively.
- The first tool is excommunication. Since it was believed that salvation resided in the church, excommunication equaled damnation.
  - Excommunication is a biblical tool brought up by Christ in Matt 18 and Paul in 1 Cor 5.



5

## The Three Tools of Papal Power

- The second tool was the interdict. It had to do with a rebellious community, not an individual.
  - Interdicts closed the doors of the church to an entire community. With closed doors, there are no sacraments, and so the entire community is damned (excommunicated).
  - The exceptions were baptism of infants and Last Rites for the dying. All the sacraments between birth and death were withheld (5 internal sacraments).
- The third tool was the ban. This was not new, but was the secular tool of banishment.
  - Popes wanted the secular rulers to back-up the ecclesiastical decisions.
  - Individuals were sometimes banished from the secular community for certain crimes.
  - The goal was that excommunicated persons could be banished from society by the secular powers. It is secular punishment for religious issues.



6

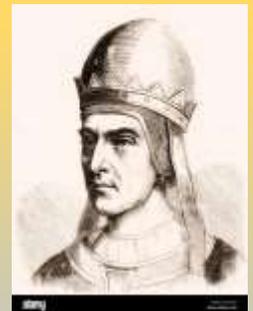
## Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085)

- Hildebrand (1015-1085) leads a reform movement among the papacy.
  - Before his time, the papacy became pawns of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Italian aristocracy. They were powerless.
- A number of reformers, Hildebrand being the greatest, worked to reform the papacy and make it independent of secular political power.
  - He saw Christian kings as agents of the devil and believed only the papacy could bring the kingdom of God to earth.
- He helped a number of popes make reforms in this direction, when eventually he was elected pope.
- One of the big victories came at the 1059 Lateran Council in Rome, where the election of popes was placed exclusively in the hands of the Cardinal clergy of Rome.
  - These were clergy that belonged to the immediate staff of the pope—consisting of seven bishops, twenty-eight priests, and eighteen deacons. This took the system completely out of the hands of secular power.
- Hildebrand was crowned Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085).
  - He believed himself to be the vicar of Peter, the head of the church.

7

## *Dictatus Papae*

- Not long after becoming Pope, Hildebrand (Gregory VII) published a statement known as *dictatus papae* (papal decree) where he made the following arguments:
  - 1) The Roman Church was founded by God alone; 2) only the Roman Pope is rightly called universal; 3) only the pope can depose and reinstate bishops; 9) only pope is worthy to have his feet kissed by secular rulers; 12) the pope can depose emperors; 16) papal authority is required to declare a council as ecumenical; 19) the pope is beyond the judgment of all people; 22) the Roman Church has never erred and it shall never err; 23) the Roman pope, if properly ordained, is sanctified by Peter's merit; 26) those that break conformity with the Roman Church are not catholic.
- Although other popes claimed similar things before him, this was forceful and confident.
  - It was going to set the stage for increasing papal power. He was determined to break the political power held over church affairs by secular rulers.
- It was around this time that Western Christianity began to call Christians on earth the "Church Militant," and those in heaven as the "Church Triumphant."
  - This was a move away from Augustine's notion that the church on earth is the Pilgrim Church. The change from pilgrim to warrior reflects a new world-dominating aggression and self confidence that the Hildebrand reform movement brought to the church.



8

## Investiture Controversy

- Even though the papacy had broken free of secular control, other problems remained.
  - He determined to break the practice of lay investiture. This was the practice where a king would invest or appoint a man of his own choosing as a bishop or abbot. The land ruled by these church officials was important to kings, and so they thought the authority of these appointments was civil rather than sacred.
- Hildebrand disagreed, and he found the practice unholy. The Church is independent from state control. How could a secular king bestow upon a bishop his ring and staff, which are symbols of a spiritual office?
- Gregory VI tests this against the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (1065-1105) in 1075.
  - He decreed that Henry must cease from the practice of lay investiture. This was a perfect man to make an example out of since the Holy Roman Emperor was the most important of the western monarchs.
  - Thus began the battle between the papalist and imperialist vision of Western Christendom.



9

## Gregory VII vs. Henry IV

- Henry was a worthy opponent since he was one of the most gifted rulers in the entire history of the Holy Roman Empire.
  - His moral character was weak, however, which many scandals, adulteries, and acts of tyranny. The German church backed him earlier when he was in civil war because they were willing to overlook his moral failures if it meant there could be a powerful Christian monarchy, which they thought was the basis for a healthy Christian society. This was the old Cluny vision of secular power.
  - Hildebrand disagreed and saw a strong papacy as the basis for a Christian society.
- At first, the German church sided with Henry. The Emperor defied the Pope and appointed the new archbishop of Milan.
  - He then called a council where the German bishops rejected Hildebrand as pope. Henry sent a threatening letter that demanded Gregory abdicate.



10

## Gregory VII vs. Henry IV

- Gregory responded by excommunicating Henry and publicly declaring that this released all of Henry's subjects from loyalty to him.
  - Henry's closest allies, the German bishops, quickly switched sides since they didn't want to lose their own position. This immediately cost Henry of two-thirds of his army since it came from church lands.
  - The German nobles took advantage of this opportunity, and they rebelled with the hope of removing him from the throne.
  - They suspended him from his imperial office, and with no effective army, he was powerless.
  - They summoned him to a council where in the presence of Gregory VII they planned to elect a new Emperor. The mighty Kaiser was toppled by the word of a pope.
- Henry journeyed down to Italy in desperation. Hildebrand was in the castle owned by the Countess of Tuscany—his political protector.
  - Henry stood outside the castle gate with his wife and children, barefoot in the freezing snow. He cried out to Gregory VII that he repented.



11

## Gregory VII vs. Henry IV

- Inside the castle, Hugh the Great of Cluny interceded on the Emperor's behalf. It seemed that Hildebrand would have shown no mercy if not for Hugh.
  - Hildebrand knew, however, that if he restored Henry to church membership, it would restore all his political power, and he might use it at a later date to destroy him. So for three days, Hildebrand hesitated.
  - His priestly conscience eventually gave in, and he allowed Henry into the castle. The young emperor promised to obey the Pope's demand to stop the practice of lay investiture. To a watching world, it was the greatest scene of the Church defeating the state.
- A civil war broke out in Germany, and Rudolf of Swabia was declared by some to be the new Emperor. The German bishops sided with Henry. Henry demanded the pope rule in his favor, but Gregory VII wavered for three years.
  - Henry became impatient and demanded in a presumptuous way that the Pope better excommunicate Rudolf immediately. The Pope decided to do the opposite, and he excommunicated Henry again. But this time it backfired.
  - The German bishops thought Rudolf had no real claim, and they placed their hopes for a stable society in the hands of Henry. So Henry called a council that declared Gregory was no longer pope and replaced him with archbishop Guibert of Ravenna.
  - Henry won the civil war when Rudolf was killed in battle. The victorious emperor invaded Italy in 1081, and in 1084, he captured Rome.

12

## Long Term Victory for the Papacy

- Hildebrand locked himself away in the Roman castle of Sant' Angelo.
- Guibert was then placed on the papal throne in Rome as Pope Clement III.
  - Clement then crowned Henry as the Holy Roman Emperor.
- The Normans in southern Italy rescued Hildebrand from Sant' Angelo, but in their attack on Rome, they wrecked it while committing outrages.
  - So Hildebrand went into exile with his Norman allies to Southern Italy, where he died in 1085.
- Even though Henry IV won the moment, he did not win the war between church and state.
- Though there were rival popes—those loyal to the Emperor and those loyal to Hildebrand's reforms—eventually Urban II (1088-1099) becomes the undisputed Pope due to his character.
  - He won the West to himself. Keep in mind that he had good character, he was a disciple of Hildebrand, and he successfully called all of Europe to Crusade (the 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade).
  - His position was secure. Urban was opposed to lay investiture.



13

## Investiture Controversy Resolved

- The next few popes continued to negotiate with Henry and later his son until a final settlement in 1122.
  - The Emperor would invest a bishop or abbot with his authority over the land that went with his office.
  - The bishop's spiritual superior (his archbishop) would invest him with his spiritual authority over the Church in the same land.
  - The Emperor would no longer confer the ring and staff.
  - This effectively created a distinction between spiritual and secular aspects of investiture. The spiritual parts belonged to the church and the secular parts belonged to the state.
- This was an increase in papal power in the following ways.
  - First, a significant amount of power was wrestled away from kings and placed in the hands of the church.
  - Second, the most powerful monarch was temporarily defeated by Pope Gregory VII (begging barefoot in the snow). This demonstrated the power of excommunication of a Pope against an Emperor.
  - Third, the College of Cardinals made Papal appointments decided by churchmen close to the current pope. Cardinals were chosen by the pope. Archbishops and bishops were chosen by their superiors in the church. Priests and abbots were chosen by bishops. The church secured ecclesiastical independence from the state.



14

## Church & State Battles in 12<sup>th</sup> Century England

- The next struggle between Church and State occurred in England.
- The Hildebrand insistence of the church's independence from the state included the idea that clergy must never be subject to the civil courts or laws.
  - If they commit a crime, Church courts can adjudicate.
- William the Conquer took over England in 1066, and he supported this, establishing civil courts and church courts.
  - The church courts were only supposed to rule on religious issues, but over time, they increased the power to adjudicate criminal cases when it applied to clergy.
- By the time we get to Henry II (1154-1189), the situation was intolerable.
  - A clergyman could commit murder, but he was ineligible to be charged by state courts. The church courts, however, only gave fines as penalties. They couldn't afford to build prisons and hire guards.
- The king demanded that the church courts remove the ordination (i.e., defrocking) of such clergy so that they could then be tried by the state.
  - The church refused because they believed ordination was for life.

15

## King Henry II vs. Thomas Becket

- This sets up England for a conflict. Thomas Becket (1118-1170) was appointed the Archbishop of Canterbury (highest religious position in England).
- He and Henry were close friends and he had always obeyed Henry in all things in his previous secular appointments.
- But Thomas now had a new boss, the Pope. And this demand from the King looked like meddling into church affairs.
  - He fiercely opposed the king and defended the right of clergy to be tried by Church courts alone.
  - Most English clergy sided with the king originally, but this all changes in 1170.
- In a rage, the king told some of his knights that he wished someone would get rid of that trouble-maker Thomas Becket.
  - Four knights thought he literally meant it, so they entered Canterbury cathedral, and murdered Becket at the altar.
  - They smashed his skull to where his brains spilled out.



16

## Pope Alexander III's Intervention

- This caused horror and outrage to spread across all of Europe.
- Everywhere, people declared Becket a martyr and ascribed power to his relics—which they credited with one of the most abundant harvests in the Middle Ages.
- Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) got involved and forced King Henry II to do public penance and give up his campaign against the Church courts. Otherwise, excommunication would be the result.
  - The king complied.
- This was one more instance where it looked like a pope's command brought a powerful monarch to his knees.
  - Excommunication was a powerful weapon that could jeopardize a monarch's position.
  - Papal power only increased because of the successful threat of excommunication.
  - Church clergy remained above secular law in England.



17

## Pope Innocent III

- The claims and power of the papacy reach their zenith during the reign of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). He was, without a doubt, the most powerful pope in history.
- He did not look down upon the kings and emperors like Hildebrand, but he did turn his lofty view of the papacy into an effective reality.
  - Under his papacy, the Pope became the political and spiritual head of Western Europe.
- Innocent was born as Lothario Conti, a member of one of Rome's oldest aristocratic families.
  - He studied law and theology in Rome, Bologna, and Paris. He became a lecturer on law at Bologna, and then was elected a Cardinal deacon in 1190.
  - In 1198, he was unanimously elected by the other Cardinals as the youngest Pope ever at the age of 37. He took the name Innocent III.
- As pope, he was patient and calculating. He always figured out how to turn hostile circumstances into his own advantage.
- Innocent III was the first pope to take the title Vicar of Christ, and he made it central to the papacy.
  - Vicar means a person that stands in the place of another. Previously, Popes claimed to be the Vicar of Peter, thus exercising his supreme apostolic authority. Even Hildebrand would claim no more than this.
  - The term Vicar of Christ could previously be used of all bishops collectively (the office), but never exclusively of an individual pope.

18

## Vicar of Christ

- In 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bernard of Clairvaux used these exalted terms of the pope in particular, but popes would not apply these to themselves.
- Additionally, vicar of God and vicar of Christ were usually used of secular kings like the Holy Roman Emperor.
  - Innocent was making a clear claim of supremacy by taking this title for himself.
- Innocent rejected the title vicar of Peter, because he said popes are the successor of Peter rather than his vicar.
  - They are not a successor of Jesus, but his vicar.
- Innocent also took the title Vicar of God, which exclusively was used for Holy Roman Emperors.
- He was claiming to be the visible manifestation of Christ on earth.
  - Since Christ has authority over both the church and the rulers of the nations, so too does the pope as His vicar. He even extended this claim of supreme authority over the angels and demons.
  - Because he stood in the place of Christ, he claimed that all things in heaven, earth, and hell should obey the popes.
- The doctrinal term for this is “plenitude of power.” Henceforth, the title vicar of Christ has been applied to the popes.



19

## Innocent III and International Politics

- The political circumstances of Europe enabled Innocent to claim this exalted status.
  - The Holy Roman Emperor suddenly died in 1197, leading to a war between two rival claimants. Germany was cast into confusion and weakness.
- Innocent took advantage of this. He abolished the last remaining power of the Emperors in Italy.
  - Since Rome's economy by this time depended on the business of the Vatican, Innocent used this fact to gain total control over the city. The aristocracy was now subordinate to him.
  - From this position, he then expanded power in central Italy by forming alliances with the Italian cities against their German governors.
- He then made a deal with one of the two rival claimants for the imperial throne, Otto of Brunswick. He would back his claim if Otto promised never to intervene in Northern Italy.
  - Otto also had to recognize the independence of the Papal States in central Italy.
  - Finally, he had to give up any remaining imperial authority over the German Church.
- The previous Emperor, Henry VI destroyed papal independence by conquering southern and northern Italy, thus surrounding the Vatican and placing his cronies in charge.
  - Innocent made it to where that could never happen again.

20

## Innocent III and International Politics

- Innocent III even got Henry's widow to give up Sicily to the Pope in exchange for him guaranteeing her young son Frederick would one day get the crown of Sicily.
  - She actually placed her son under Innocent's care, which paid off since he would become more than king of Sicily. He will become Emperor Frederick II.
- In all this political maneuvering, he gave the Papal States the shape they would have until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He maintained political power of Italy and could function as a head of state just as much as the head of church.
- Innocent insisted on the absolute right of the papacy to control the beliefs and moral conduct of the entire Catholic world.
  - This meant he could depose kings of emperors that violated Church law. This then gave him power over other states.
- To test this strength, he will make examples in all three of Europe's great monarchies: Germany, England, and France.



21

## Humbling the Emperor

- Starting with Germany, after he crowned Otto in 1209, the Emperor broke his word and tried to reconquer southern Italy (Naples) to regain Sicily.
- Innocent immediately excommunicated him and recognized Henry VI's son Frederick as the Holy Roman Emperor, if he ceded his claim to Sicily.
  - He then placed Frederick in alliance with France's King Philip Augustus. Otto forged an alliance with King John of England.
  - The Pope headed the first great conflict of international military alliances in European history.
- In 1214, the papal alliance won a decisive victory at Bouvines (in modern Belgium—it was France back then).
  - Frederick was then crowned as the Holy Roman Emperor.
  - This is the Frederick of the sixth Crusade that talked the Muslims into making him king of Jerusalem.
- Overall, however, these conflicts permanently weakened the Holy Roman Empire's authority.
  - The years of civil war allowed the local rulers (counts, dukes, and princes) of the individual states to win back their power against centralization.
  - This was deliberate on Innocent's part since the greatest political threat to the papacy has always been a strong centralized Holy Roman Empire. It's fragmented state left it weak.
  - Of course, later that fragmentation will serve Martin Luther and the Reformation's interests.

22

## Innocent III vs. King John

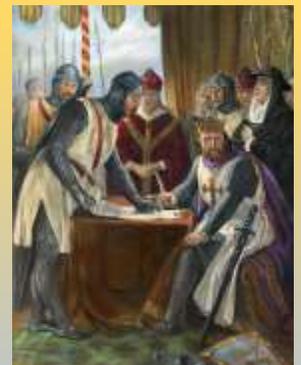
- Innocent displayed far greater success over King John of England (1199-1216).
- He rejected John's choice for the archbishop of Canterbury, and appointed one of his own Cardinals, Stephen Langton in 1207 (this is the man that divided the Bible into chapters and verses).
  - John refused to accept Stephen. Innocent threatened to place England under interdict until King John submitted.
  - John retorted that he would expel all clergy from England if Innocent did this.
- Innocent responded by declaring interdict in 1208. After England went four years without any Church services, John still refused to accept Langton as archbishop.
- In 1212, Innocent then excommunicated John and released all English nobles from their oath of loyalty to him.
- He then called on all the other kings of Europe to dethrone John in a crusade.
  - John gave in, and his groveling was both public and humiliating.



23

## King John's Humiliation

- In 1213, he surrendered his entire kingdom to Innocent—it was now the property of the Pope.
  - He promised to pay an annual tax to the papacy and to recognize Langton as archbishop.
- Innocent then removed the interdict (it was now six years without church services).
  - The English monarchy was the most successful in Europe, but here it was on its face at the feet of Innocent III.
- English nobles later took advantage of John's weakness and successfully fought a small war against him, forcing his signature/seal on the Magna Carta in 1215.
  - This is the backbone of our Declaration of Independence and Constitution.
  - It stated that people have rights against the king.
  - Because John had pledged loyalty to Pope Innocent III, he did not have to enforce a single thing of the Magna Carta, and for the next 500 years, English rulers ignored it.
  - We make a bigger deal of it than they do.



24

## Humbling the King of France

- Innocent also made an example out of France.
- In 1193, Philip Augustus married a sister of the king of Denmark (Ingeborg, 18 years old), but then soon afterward lost interest in her and forced the French bishops to cancel the marriage and lock her in a nunnery.
- Innocent took up her cause after becoming Pope in 1198.
  - When Philip attempted a second marriage, Innocent placed all of France under an interdict in 1200.
  - The goal was to force his reconciliation with Ingeborg.
  - Philip held out until his new love interest died, and then he reluctantly caved in. He released Ingeborg from her imprisonment and took her back as his wife.
- Years later, he was a loyal alliance member in the Pope's military alliance against Otto and John.
- In these three examples, Innocent III forced all three great kingdoms of Catholic Europe to bow to his will as the Vicar of Christ.



25

## Conclusion

- Papal power reached a peak under Innocent III.
- We looked at the various factors that allowed for this ascendancy.
  - Monasticism, Crusades, Scholasticism, and Sacraments.
- We looked at the tools used by a series of Popes against secular powers.
  - Excommunication, Interdict, and Ban
- We saw how three popes were able to increase ecclesiastical power at the expense of secular power.
  - Gregory VII and the investiture controversy gained Church independence from the state. He also successfully humbled an Emperor with excommunication.
  - Alexander III humbled a king with the threat of excommunication, thereby keeping clergy exempt from secular criminal law.
  - Innocent III used excommunication and interdict to humble the three greatest monarchs in Europe. He also established the Papal States.
- With the papacy at its height, it's power will only begin to decline.

26