



4.1D. Conflict between Church and State

What do you see in this picture? Describe the three central figures in the picture. How are they different from each other? What seems to be going on between them? Who might they be? Who is in control of the situation? Who are all the people surrounding the figures? How are they responding to the scene?

- In this slide we see a depiction of the struggle between Henry IV, Holy Roman Emperor, and Pope Gregory VII.
- During the Middle Ages, all Christians in western Europe belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. This church was organized as a hierarchy in which all members of the clergy had a rank. The head priest of a parish, or local church, was called a pastor. A diocese was a group of neighboring parishes. Each diocese was governed by a bishop, who ruled his diocese from a cathedral, or large, centrally located church. Dioceses were grouped regionally into provinces, called archdioceses, which were ruled by archbishops. In turn, these archbishops were governed by cardinals, who lived in Rome and counseled the pope. The pope was the bishop of Rome, a title inherited from the apostle Peter, whom Christians believe was chosen by Jesus to lead Christ's followers after His death.
- In the medieval era, the church wielded great power. By the year 1050, the church was the largest landholder in Europe. The church had its own code of law, called canon law, and administered its own courts, which rivaled the feudal courts. Very few people outside of the clergy could read or write. This included kings and nobles, which meant that priests and monks served as record keepers and assistants to royalty. Consequently, the church gained political position and power. At times the church and state officials worked very well together, but at other times they fought over power.
- By the time the monk Hildebrand became pope in 1073, the church had grown corrupt in many places. Many bishops and abbots were also powerful landholding nobles. They worked with kings to extend their influence and increase their wealth. Because of this corruption, many people had lost respect for the church. However, the monk Hildebrand, who took the papal title Gregory VII, represented a movement to reform the church. Specifically, he wanted to end the practice of lay investiture. Lay investiture meant that important church officials could be chosen by kings, instead of exclusively by the pope. Through lay investiture, a king could be sure that a bishop or archbishop would support him instead of the pope or other church official.
- In 1075, Gregory VII issued a document stating that only the pope could appoint cardinals and bishops, thereby outlawing lay investiture. In this document, the pope warned that kings who disobeyed his orders could be excommunicated, or deprived of the rights of church membership. Since such censure barred an individual from the church community, it was also believed that excommunication deprived an individual of the means of gaining salvation.

- Henry IV, Holy Roman Emperor, was upset by Gregory's decree. Henry relied on the loyalty of the clergy to support him against powerful German nobles. In an angry letter addressed to "Hildebrand, no longer pope, but false monk," Henry called for Gregory to step down as pope and to, "Descend, descend, to be damned throughout the ages." Gregory responded by excommunicating Henry, which meant that the emperor was excluded from the sacraments and that his subjects did not have to obey him.
- When Henry realized that he could not defeat Pope Gregory VII or overcome excommunication, he decided to ask for forgiveness in hopes that he could save his throne. He traveled over mountains during the winter and found the pope in his castle at Canossa, located in the Alps in northern Italy. Barefoot and wearing only a rough cloak, Henry prayed and begged in the snow outside the gates of Canossa. After three days, the pope forgave the emperor. According to tradition, the countess Matilda of Tuscany—pictured behind Pope Gregory in the slide—was one of the pope's strongest allies and helped reconcile Gregory and Henry. The pope was victorious in this round of conflict between church and state, but the struggles continued.
- In 1122, representatives of Pope Gregory VII, Emperor Henry IV, and important nobles met in the German city of Worms, where they reached a compromise on the question of lay investiture. This treaty, called the Concordat of Worms, stated that church officials alone would have the authority to elect cardinals, bishops, and abbots, while the king would retain the power to bestow feudal titles and land grants to the church officials. This division of power was represented by a solemn ceremony, in which the bishop received three objects: a ring, a staff, and a rod. The staff and ring represented the bishop's role as spiritual leader; the rod represented his role as political leader. This concordat showed that despite the conflict between church and state, the church remained deeply involved in all aspects of life in the Middle Ages.



Ask six or seven students to come forward and stand in front of the slide, assuming the positions of Pope Gregory VII, Henry IV, Mathilda, and others. Ask each person to explain his/her understanding of the conflict. Prompt them with the following questions:

- Henry, what do you have in your belt? Why? What kind of mood are you in?
- Pope Gregory, what is that on your robe? On your head? How are you feeling right now? Who do you think the soldiers are here to defend?
- Why did Pope Gregory VII outlaw lay investiture? What happened to those rulers who ignored his decree? Was it fair of Pope Gregory to excommunicate Henry IV? Why or why not?
- What was Emperor Henry IV's response to the decree? Why was he so upset? What should Henry have done, ignore or obey the pope? Why?
- How was the conflict between the two men resolved? Who won in the end?
- What does this conflict tell about the relationship between the church and state officials? Who do you think had more power? Why?

Slide 4.1D: Conflict Between Church and State

The State's Position



Henry IV,
Holy Roman
Emperor

- angered by Pope Gregory's actions because he needed church leaders to support him against powerful German lords

Lay Investiture
Who should appoint church officials?



The Church's Position



Pope
Gregory VII

- wanted to reform corrupt church leaders who plotted with kings to increase their wealth and power
- in A.D. 1075 outlawed lay investiture (church officials being chosen by kings)
- threatened to excommunicate any king who disobeyed (thus taking away the means to gain salvation)

Key Events in the Conflict between Henry and Gregory

- Henry IV demanded that Gregory VII resign as pope
- Henry IV was excommunicated by Pope Gregory VII

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- Henry realized he could not defeat the pope
- begged for Gregory's forgiveness
- with the help of Countess Matilda, Henry was forgiven

2

- lay investiture issue resolved with the Concordat of Worms
- agreement that church officials could appoint church leaders
- kings could give titles and land grants to church officials

3

