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The Church Wields Power

TERMS & NAMES

- clergy
- sacrament
- canon law
- Holy Roman Empire
- lay investiture

MAIN IDEA

Church leaders and political leaders competed for power and authority.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Today many religious leaders still voice their opinions on political issues.

SETTING THE STAGE Amid the weak central governments in feudal Europe, the Church emerged as a powerful institution. It shaped the lives of people from all social classes. As the Church expanded its political role, strong rulers began to question the pope's authority. Dramatic power struggles unfolded in the Holy Roman Empire—the scene of mounting tensions between popes and emperors.

The Scope of Church Authority

In crowning Charlemagne emperor in 800, the Church sought to influence both spiritual and political matters. Three hundred years earlier, Pope Gelasius I recognized the conflicts that could arise between the two great forces—the Church and the state. He wrote, “There are two powers by which this world is chiefly ruled: the sacred authority of the priesthood and the authority of kings.”

Gelasius suggested an analogy to solve such conflicts. God had created two symbolic swords. One sword was religious. The other was political. The pope held a spiritual sword. The emperor wielded a political one.

Gelasius thought that the pope should bow to the emperor in political matters. In turn, the emperor should bow to the pope in religious matters. If each ruler kept the authority in his own realm, Gelasius suggested, the two leaders could share power in harmony.

In reality, though, the Church and state disagreed on the boundaries of either realm. Clashes erupted throughout the Middle Ages. The Church and various European governments competed for power.

Church Structure Somewhat like the system of feudalism, the Church established its own organization. The distribution of power was based on status. Church structure consisted of different ranks of **clergy**, or religious officials. The pope headed the Church in Rome. All clergy, including bishops and priests, fell under his authority. Bishops supervised priests, the lowest ranking members of the clergy. Bishops also settled disputes over Church teachings and religious practices. For most people, local priests served as the main contact with the Church.

Religion as a Unifying Force Feudalism and the manor system created divisions among people. Shared beliefs in the teachings of the Church bonded people together. During an era of constant warfare and political turmoil, the Church was a stable force. The Church provided Christians with a sense of security and a religious community to which they might belong. The Middle Ages in Europe were aptly named the Age of Faith. Religion at this time occupied center stage.

Medieval Christians' everyday lives were often harsh. Still, they could all follow the same path to salvation—everlasting life in heaven. Priests and other religious officials administered the **sacraments**, or important religious ceremonies. These rites paved the

Background

The clergy was also part of the feudal system. In the early Middle Ages, some bishops, like other vassals, owed military service to their lord and fought courageously in battles.



This jeweled tiara, which a pope would wear in a procession, reflects the wealth, power, and authority of his office.



way for achieving salvation. For example, through the sacrament of baptism, people became part of the Christian community. Through confirmation, baptized people of their own will publicly acknowledged their membership in the Church.

At the local level, the village church was a unifying force in the daily lives of most people. It served as a religious and social center. People worshiped together at the church. They also met and talked with other villagers. Religious holidays, especially Christmas and Easter, were occasions for social gatherings and festive celebrations.

Church Justice The scope of the Church's authority was both religious and political. The Church provided a unifying set of spiritual beliefs and rituals. The Church also created a system of justice to guide people's conduct. All medieval Christians, kings and peasants alike, were subject to **canon law**, or the law of the Church, in matters such as marriage and religious practices. The Church also established courts to try people accused of violating canon law. Two of the harshest punishments that offenders faced were excommunication and interdict.

Popes used the threat of excommunication—banishment from the Church—to wield power over political rulers. For example, a disobedient king's quarrel with a pope might result in excommunication. This meant the king would be denied salvation. Excommunication also freed all the king's vassals from their duties to him. If an excommunicated king continued to disobey the pope, the pope, in turn, could use an even more frightening weapon—the interdict. Under an interdict, many sacraments and religious services could not be performed in the king's lands. As Christians, the king's subjects believed that without such sacraments they might be doomed to eternal suffering in hell. In the 11th century, excommunication and the possible threat of an interdict would force a German emperor to submit to the pope's commands.

The Church and the Holy Roman Empire

After the death of Charlemagne, the **Holy Roman Empire** was the strongest kingdom that arose from the ruins of his empire. When Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor in 800, he unknowingly set the stage for future conflicts between popes and emperors.

Otto I Allies with the Church The most effective ruler of medieval Germany was Otto I. He was known as Otto the Great. Otto, crowned king in 936, consciously copied the policies of his boyhood hero, Charlemagne. Like Charlemagne, Otto formed a close alliance with the Church. To limit the nobles' strength, Otto sought help from the clergy. He built up his power base by gaining the support of the bishops and abbots, the heads of monasteries. Otto dominated the Church in Germany. He also used his power to defeat unruly German princes.

Following in Charlemagne's footsteps, Otto also invaded Italy on the pope's behalf. In 962, the pope rewarded Otto by crowning him emperor.

Signs of Future Conflicts The German-Italian empire Otto created was first called the Roman Empire of the German Nation. It later became known as the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire remained the strongest state in Europe until about 1100. However, Otto's attempt to revive Charlemagne's empire caused trouble for future German leaders. Italian nobles resented German rule. Popes too came to fear the political power that the German emperors held over Italy.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Analyzing

Motives Why did medieval peasants support the Church?

Daily Life

An Age of Superstition

Along with their devout Christian faith, many people during the Middle Ages also clung to superstitious beliefs. Medieval people expected the dead to reappear as ghosts. A friendly goblin might do a person a good deed, but an evil witch might cause great harm. Medieval people thought an evil witch had the power to exchange a healthy child for a sickly one.

The medieval Church frowned upon superstitions such as these:

- Preparing a table with three knives to please good fairies
- Making a vow by a tree, a pond, or any place but a church
- Believing that a person could change into the shape of a wolf
- Believing that the croak of a raven or meeting a priest would bring a person good or bad luck

Background

The Holy Roman Empire was located in the region of present-day Germany.



Holy Roman Emperor Clashes with the Pope

The Church began to resent the control that kings, such as Otto, exercised over clergy and their offices. The focus of this resentment was **lay investiture**—a ceremony in which kings and nobles appointed church officials. Whoever controlled lay investiture wielded the real power in naming bishops. They were powerful clergy whom kings sought to control. Church reformers felt that bishops should not be under the power of any king. In 1075, Pope Gregory VII banned lay investiture.

The furious young German emperor, Henry IV, immediately called a meeting of the German bishops he had appointed. With their approval, the emperor sent a vicious letter to Gregory VII. Henry called Gregory “not pope, but false monk” and ordered him to step down from the papacy. Gregory fired back and excommunicated Henry. Afterward, German bishops and princes sided with the pope. Determined to save his throne, Henry tried to win the pope’s forgiveness.

Showdown at Canossa In January 1077, Henry journeyed over the snowy Alps to the Italian town of Canossa (kuh-NAHS-uh). He approached the castle where Pope Gregory was a guest. Gregory later described the scene:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

There, having laid aside all the belongings of royalty, wretchedly, with bare feet and clad in wool, he [Henry IV] continued for three days to stand before the gate of the castle. Nor did he desist from imploring with many tears the aid and consolation of the apostolic mercy until he had moved all of those who were present there. . . .

POPE GREGORY, cited in *Basic Documents in Medieval History*

The Pope was obligated to forgive any sinner who begged so humbly. Still, Gregory kept Henry waiting in the snow for three days before ending his excommunication.

The meeting in Canossa was one of the most dramatic confrontations of the Middle Ages. Yet it actually solved nothing. A triumphant Henry rushed home to punish the

nobles who had rebelled against him. The pope had gained an even greater victory by humiliating the proudest ruler in Europe. The key question of lay investiture remained undecided.

Concordat of Worms Gregory’s and Henry’s successors continued to fight over lay investiture until 1122. That year, representatives of the Church and the emperor met in the German city of Worms (wurms). There they reached a compromise known as the Concordat of Worms. By its terms, the Church alone could grant a bishop his ring and staff, symbols of Church office. Yet the emperor had the veto power to prevent the appointment of a bishop.

During Henry’s struggle, German princes regained much of the power they had lost under Otto the Great. A later German ruler, Frederick I, would resume the battle to build up royal authority.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Making Inferences Why was Henry’s journey to Canossa a political maneuver?



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Region** How many states make up the Holy Roman Empire? What does this suggest about ruling it as an empire?
- Location** How does the location of the Papal States make them an easy target for frequent invasions by Germanic rulers?



Renewed Church Conflicts Under Frederick I

Vocabulary

Barbarossa: “red beard” in Italian.

By 1152, the seven German princes who elected the German king realized that Germany needed a strong ruler to keep the peace. The princes chose Frederick I. His red beard earned him the nickname “Barbarossa.”

Frederick I was the first ruler to call his lands the Holy Roman Empire. However, this region was actually a patchwork of feudal territories. His forceful personality and military skills enabled him to dominate the German princes. Yet whenever he left the country, disorder returned.

Following Otto the Great’s example, Frederick did not focus on building royal power in Germany. Instead, he repeatedly invaded the rich cities of Italy. Frederick’s brutal tactics spurred Italian merchants to unite against him. Like Henry IV, Frederick angered the pope, who joined the merchants. Together, Frederick’s enemies formed an alliance called the Lombard League.

In 1176, the foot soldiers of the Lombard League faced Frederick’s army of mounted knights at the Battle of Legnano (lay-NYAHN-oh). In an astonishing victory, these foot soldiers used crossbows to defeat feudal knights for the first time in history.

In 1177, Frederick made peace with the pope and returned to Germany. Frederick’s military defeat, though, had undermined his authority with the German princes. Their power continued to grow in spite of Frederick’s efforts. After he drowned in 1190, Frederick’s empire dissolved into an array of fragmented feudal states.



This stained-glass portrait of Frederick I projects an image of imperial power. Yet like Henry IV, Frederick’s clashes with the pope eroded the emperor’s authority.

German States Remain Separate

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Analyzing

Causes What long-lasting political trend kept German states separate during the Middle Ages?

By getting involved in Italian politics, German kings after Frederick continued their attempts to revive Charlemagne’s empire and his alliance with the Church. This policy led to wars with Italian cities and to further clashes with the pope. These conflicts were among several reasons why the feudal states of Germany did not unify during the Middle Ages.

The system of German princes electing the king weakened royal authority. German rulers controlled fewer royal lands to use as a base of power than French and English kings, who were establishing strong central authority. These kings made changes in the legal system that would lay the foundation for modern unified nation-states.

As you will read in Chapter 14, feudalism in France and England spurred the rise of powerful leaders. They would create strong and enduring nations. Gradually, orderly government would replace the fighting and frequent warfare that characterized feudal societies, such as Germany.

Section 4 Assessment

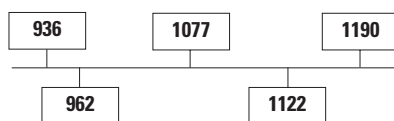
1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- clergy
- sacrament
- canon law
- Holy Roman Empire
- lay investiture

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a time line like the one below for the Holy Roman Empire. Write the significance of each date shown.



For which events did the Church and rulers engage in a power struggle? Why?

3. EVALUATING DECISIONS

Do you think the Concordat of Worms was a fair compromise for both the emperor and the Church? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT

- the Church’s authority in spiritual matters
- the emperor’s political power
- the problems that remained unresolved

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Power and Authority Work with a partner to play the roles of Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. Based on your role-play, write a dialogue about their meeting at Canossa.