

Papal Intervention
In England
In The Thirteenth Century
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Signature Page

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Abstract

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As Western Europe was entering the thirteenth century, a very strong willed, opinionated, driven, devout, narrowly focused individual had just assumed the papal throne. Innocent III did not bring many new ideas to the papacy, but he did bring an ability to translate ideas and philosophies written about by popes and canonists that had preceded him into coherent Church policy and law. He began to implement these policies and attempted to mold the countries of Western Europe into fiefdoms of the Church, with the pope as their liege lord.

The European monarch who became the primary target of this attempt at papal domination was King John of England. John came to power the year following Innocent III and died three months after Innocent. These two men fought a titanic struggle over papal prerogatives and the rights of kingship as it relates to the Church. This conflict established a legacy that led the Church into a role it was not ready to fulfill. The result was the disastrous pontificate of Boniface VIII and the collapse of the papacy as it had been known, a blow from which the Church has never recovered.

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Papal Intervention In England

During The Thirteenth Century

Chapter I

Introduction

As the thirteenth century began, the Catholic Church and England were reaching an impasse. The papacy was being held by men who increasingly believed that the Church should be the dominate party in the relationship between Church and state. The basic beliefs of the people and the monarchs remained the same, but the men who were governing the Church were changing. God was still the dominate force in everybody's life. The conflict was coming over who was to speak for God and who was to be responsible for the clerical appointments in England. The new pope, Innocent III was putting forth some new ideas which were to attempt to alter the balance of power between the secular governments of Europe and the Church. King John had just stumbled into the monarchy and was very happy with the traditional relationship that the English monarchy had had with the Church since the time of Henry I. The Church was on the verge of making significant changes in the

way that the ecclesiastical government was organized. This battle became particularly intense during the early part of the thirteenth century due to the personalities of the central figures.

England was a microcosm of what was going on all over Europe in Church-State relations. The domination of England was important for the popes. England could not be left alone as the Church had to exercise its authority over all western kingdoms and impose its will on all of these states, or the other states would not be so easy to control.

A close examination of the relationship between one of the greatest and most strong-willed popes that ever lived, Innocent III and King John of England and then, later, between Pope Boniface VIII, one of the most corrupt and selfish popes that ever lived, and Edward I of England, provides a wonderful opportunity to see why the papacy started the century growing in power and prestige and ended the century in flames, destined never to recover its glory and influence. These lawyer-popes that bracketed the century embodied everything that was right and wrong with the medieval papacy.

The early struggles in England became as involved as any on the continent as England had one of the wildest men of his time on the throne - King John. The century began with a

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large part of France belonging to the English king. These Norman lands had belonged to the English since the Conquest in 1066. As the years progressed, John lost more and more of the lands on the European continent. As it appeared that he lost the territory due to inattention and indolence, it was not unreasonable at the time to think that this geographic partition could be restored as quickly as it was lost. The popes had to believe that the English king was a potential ruler of France as well. This gave England an importance it might not have had otherwise. The pope in power in 1200 was Innocent III, an astute lawyer and politician who was ready to give battle to make the Church and its influence the all powerful entity he envisioned it to be.

In order to understand the events in the thirteenth century and the interaction between the pope and the English king and his subjects, it is necessary to examine what laid the foundations for the events of the thirteenth century. The founders of the Church believed that the primary mission of the Church was to save men and women from the eternal damnation to which Adam and Eve had sentenced them. Jesus had made salvation possible. Christ had left the apostle Peter as his successor in the government of the church, which became to be known as the Catholic Church after its competitors had been

eliminated ("...thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church..."(Matt. 16:18).)¹

It is important to remember that it was believed by all God fearing people in the West that the Church held the keys to heaven and no one could cross the threshold into the promised land without its blessing and permission. As no alternative religion was offered in the West until Martin Luther, the Church's approval of the activities of man took on an added importance. The Devil and eternal damnation were very real to the thirteenth century mind. The power and influence of the Church grew over the centuries. This was not due to an increase in the Church's influence over the common people so much as the growth of its influence over the kings, queens and emperors.

The popes learned early on that they were not good generals and that war waged by the Church was not the way to convince its subjects to believe in the almighty and the absolute power of the Church. One of the most striking failures of papal warfare was when Bruno of Toul, who was Pope Leo IX, went on an expedition against the Normans with disastrous results.² It became necessary to have the political backing of important rulers. The other

¹ Ferdinand Schevill, A History of Europe From The reformation To The Present Day (New York, 1925), 15.

² L. Elliot Binns The Decline and Fall of the Medieval
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kings would fall in line if the most powerful monarchs were on the side of the Church.

Since Pope Leo III liberated the papacy from the constitutional framework of the Eastern Empire by making Charlemagne the "Holy Roman Emperor" in the year 800³, the papacy was always trying to increase its influence, its ability to collect funds and its land holdings for the support of its kingdom. These two goals go hand in hand as no one will give money or land to someone who is not powerful or whose favor is not needed.

Land holdings came from gifts made to the clergy by devout followers either of the nobility, the wealthy, or by bequests from the monarchs. These lands usually came with the means of support (peasants, animals, etc.) and also the secular obligations normally

Papacy (London, 1934), 37.

³ Walter Ullmann, The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages (London, 1962), 115.

The entire quote about the coronation of Charlemagne can be found in these original sources:

The Biography of Leo III from Liber Pontificalis, ed. L. Duchense, (Paris 1886-1892), II, 7.

Annales Laureshamenses, a. 801 ed. G. Pertz, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores, (Hanover, 1826), I, 38.

Eginhard, Vie de Charlemagne, Chapter 28, ed. and tr. Louis Halphen, 3 ed., revised and corrected (Paris, Societe d'Editions "Les Belles Lettres," 1947), 80.

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assigned to such landowners. Up to the thirteenth century, the Church had been slowly building up its estates. Once land was given to the Church or was dedicated to a monastery, that land tended to remain in the control of the Church in perpetuity. No doubt that many of the bequests were the price paid for eternal salvation by the nobles or monarchs making the grant.

These prodigious land holdings accumulated by the clerical aristocracy of western Europe had the extensive political privileges and responsibilities which tended to accompany all large accumulations of land. This constant acquisition of land and power could be attributed to the Roman Imperial model that the Church had as its legacy.⁴ The Romans were constantly increasing their land holdings. Expansion of their territory was a national pastime. It was also how the Romans expanded their markets and increased their power. The papacy, being a Roman institution, had this as its cultural heritage. Emile Gebhart has stated that "in the feudal state secular greatness was the Church's only guarantee of integrity".⁵ Eventually these holdings became so large that they (the holdings) and the political privileges that had been accumulated by the clergy, created jealousy with

⁴ Binns, 36.

⁵ Emile Gebhart, *Mystics & Heretics in Italy at the End of the Middle Ages*, tr Edward Maelin Hulme (London, 1922), 37.

some of the feudal princes.⁶

Up until the thirteenth century this land accumulation was not so much of a problem in England as the king was still basically in charge of the Church. The king made or approved of all of the major appointments of the Church leadership. As long as this power remained with the crown, the conflict was minimized between the Church and the king. The pope was a religious leader who set Church doctrine and policy, but this doctrine and policy had no significant effect on the secular government. English kings did not take interference or disobedience from religious leaders well. The episode between King Henry II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket is a case in point.

The big advantage the popes enjoyed over other rulers was their clerical dominion had no defined borders and could not be invaded by belligerent forces, unless it was by those of a spiritual nature. The Vatican was the only physical land that was part of their empire. As territory it was not desirable by most of the constituency of the pope and it was not really practical to mount an attack on it unless you were physically close by. The only spiritual opposition was in the form of Lucifer. So naturally, any opposition to the popes was

⁶ Sidney Painter, The Reign of King John (New York, 1949), 151.

inspired by the devil. The perpetrator of these actions was, of course, in league with the devil and needed to be appropriately disciplined. The only means of discipline that the clergy had was to rob the perpetrators of these transgressions of the right of passage to heaven and/or of the sacraments of the Church.

When this discipline was judiciously applied and not overdone, the clergy could exert enormous control over the populace and its rulers. This control was effective as long as those it was applied against believed that the Church had some mystical power over life, death and eternal salvation. It was very efficacious against the general populace as those people had no recourse against the Church. The Church's wishes, in the case of peasants and minor officials, were usually backed by the force of the secular prince.

As most of the clerical aristocracies were landholders, certain secular duties and responsibilities came with land ownership. These religious men could try offenders not only in the religious courts, but also in the secular court, as this right accompanied the control and ownership of land. Thus, the general populace, particularly those living on Church land, had to be very wary of offending the religious leaders. The peasant had two masters, the clergy, who may have been the more powerful in the eyes of the peasant, and the liege lord, often this was one and the same. When these duties were combined, it became

difficult to separate transgressions against one or the other.

The main weapon in the arsenal of the clergy was that of *excommunication*, which effectively ostracizes the individual from Christian society. All contact with anyone except the person's spouse was forbidden; the excommunicate was isolated and treated as if he had an infectious disease. In the eyes of the Church he did; anyone who had unauthorized contact with the excommunicate would then also be excommunicated⁷. Oaths of fealty were canceled.⁸ It became impossible for a monarch to govern effectively after excommunication. This was a very powerful weapon as it both cut the offending individual off from social contact in his earthly world, and also promised that he would never see heaven in the afterlife - a very intimidating threat for medieval society. The Church had been conditioning their flock for centuries on the value and necessity of salvation, to deprive one of it was devastating.

At the same time this threat was an example of the political and military feebleness of the

⁷ One of the most famous cases of this was when the emperor Henry IV, in 1076, refused to give up contact with his five excommunicate counselors. This was perhaps the straw that pushed Pope Gregory VII into excommunicating Henry.

⁸ Ullmann, 300.

power of the pope. Roger of Wendover gave a description of a confrontation that Pope Gregory IX had in 1228 with the people of Rome;

During the festival of Easter in the same year the people of Rome rose in sedition against pope Gregory, and drove him from the city; they then pursued him to his castle of Viterbo, and there increasing in strength they drove him to Perusium. The pope, having no other means of punishing them, excommunicated them all.⁹

The pope was showing the weakness of the papacy by using excommunication as the means to crush a rebellion. He had not cultivated strong enough relationships with monarchs who would come to his rescue in times of trouble. The people of Rome apparently did not fear Gregory or his spiritual sanctions or they would not have rebelled. The papacy was only as strong as the legitimate rulers the popes had recruited to defend it. Without friends, the pope was just another street corner preacher on an apple crate.

Contrast the experience of Pope Gregory IX with a previous Gregory, Gregory VII. Gregory VII excommunicated Henry IV and then deposed him.¹⁰ In this famous incident, Henry was forced to kneel in the snow to beg the forgiveness of Gregory. In the 140

⁹ Roger of Wendover's, Flowers of History", tr J. A. Giles (London, 1849), 508.

¹⁰ Ullmann, 302.

years between these events and this incredible display of papal power and the later display of papal weakness, the papacy had lost its ability to intimidate to the degree that monarchs would come barefoot in the snow to plead their case. King John demonstrated his lack of fear by ignoring Innocent for years and finally making a compromise, which if examined closely (which we will do), was anything but a submission on his (John's) part.

In the thirteenth century, the papacy had lost touch with its past. Pope Leo III had understood why he needed the sponsorship of Charlemagne; Pope Gregory IX (and Innocent III) did not understand where their power came from. As is not unusual when power starts blinding those holding it, this process of losing touch with the lessons of the past began to gather momentum with the papacy of Innocent III. It continued throughout the thirteenth century and was eventually to lead to the disastrous papacy of Boniface VIII.

This power exerted by the Church extended into the upper reaches of secular government as well. As long as the monarch of the realm was behind the Church, all of the nobles had to toe the line with the Church. Clerical influence started to diminish when the clerics put themselves at odds with the monarchy. This happened frequently,

as we shall see, in thirteenth century England.

The landed clergy also controlled significant numbers of troops, which were pledged to their ruler in time of trouble. This was an incentive for the monarch to get along with the clergy. The clergy were also the only class of people who were universally educated. Administration of the kingdom would have been almost impossible without the help and assistance of the clerks.

Prelates who were astute could manipulate their overlords in multiple ways. Being the educated class, they had ready access to the king. They ran his courts. They administered his realm. They had not only the religious sword, but also the actual sword of war in the form of knight's fees and supporting troops that could be made readily available to the king. Reluctant warriors are never good fighters. It was important to the monarchs to retain the good graces of as many of their nobility (clergy included) as was possible in order to field an effective army. Delay by unhappy vassals could be disastrous in a campaign.¹¹

¹¹ Painter, 151.

It also helped if the monarch was a true believer in God and the Church. Rulers, like King John, who were ambivalent in their religious convictions, were less susceptible to intimidation by religious leaders as was the case with King John. This kind of a ruler had to be dealt with in a more practical way than the ruler who had an unyielding devotion to God and Jesus Christ.

The English monarchy, since King Stephen¹², was never one that had an overwhelmingly religious bent. The English kings had been independent and had not allowed very much interference from the Church. The conflict between Henry II and Thomas Becket is legendary. These monarchs had made their own appointments to high religious office, and were used to having these appointments summarily approved. The English monarchy viewed the Church more as an adjunct to their government than as a separate entity. John's viewpoint and that of Innocent could not have been more opposite.

As we shall see, the English monarchy and the papacy were on a collision course. The twelfth century had been one in which the papacy had been increasing the pressure on the European monarchs to become more submissive to the desires of the Church. The

¹² Painter, 152.

succession of Innocent III to the papal throne signaled a rapid escalation of this pressure. Innocent had his own ideas about the direction the Church should take and the power of the papacy. For the most part, early in the thirteenth century, the monarchs viewed the Church and Innocent as a puppy dog snipping at their heels.

Chapter II

Innocent III

While Innocent is not generally well known, except by historians, he is one of the most influential men in western history. He had a clear view of was the role of the Church and the role of the pope as the leader of the Church. He was single minded in his pursuit of the proper direction of the papacy, the Church and the relationship of the secular world to the Church. The author of the Gesta Innocentii describes the personality of Innocent:

He was a man who was learned in both literature and scripture...
neither prodigal nor covetous . . . harsh with the inobedient and the
obstinate, but kind to the humble and loyal . . . humble in prosperity
and patient in adversity, a little prone to anger, but quick to forgive.¹³

Pennington describes the confidence of Innocent: "Innocent III was a Roman aristocrat who seems never to have felt the searching self-doubt some men endure while holding high office."¹⁴ He had the arrogance required to be an effective autocrat. There is little doubt that Innocent had all of the qualities necessary to pull the Church and the papacy into the leadership role he felt was their due. He was intelligent, incisive, haughty, and

¹³Gesta Innocentii, 111, PL 214.XVII, tr Kenneth Pennington, Popes and Bishops The Papal Monarchy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Philadelphia, 1984), 12.

truly believed in his cause. Innocent is considered by many to be a genius and even the greatest pope of the Middle Ages.¹⁵

He had his own sense of what he felt the papacy had inherited from Peter. When Christ said

¹⁴ Pennington, 45.

¹⁵ Pennington, 12.

...thou art Peter and on this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.¹⁶

Innocent interpreted the "gates of Hell" to be anyone who disobeyed the pope, whether that person was secular or ecclesiastical. He spent his reign¹⁷ trying to show anyone who crossed him that he was not a man to be trifled with nor was the office of pope one to be ignored or defied. He was determined that the papacy should be omnipotent in all things. The office was second to no man and was only responsible to God. Innocent's feeling of papal infallibility was both his strength and his weakness. In Innocent's eyes the only person who knew what God wanted was the pope and the pope happened to be Innocent III.

He was a man who had a short temper, not a man of compromise, traits which were to do him harm in his dealings with all those around him and cause him to establish precedents which would eventually lead to the weakening of the Church and the erosion

¹⁶ Matt: 16, 18-19.

¹⁷ Innocent has been accused by many scholars of establishing a "Papal Monarchy". Therefore "reign" may be the proper term as it relates to Innocent III.

of the power of the pope.

Innocent used the crusade to its fullest. Innocent was ready to sponsor a crusade against his enemies whether that enemy was Moslem or Christian. In 1204 "at the instance of pope Innocent the fortieth part of the revenues of all the churches was given in aid of the Holy Land against the Saracens"¹⁸. Later, Innocent proclaimed a crusade in Italy against the Count of Toulouse¹⁹. Elizabeth T. Kennan has stated that Innocent III and Gregory IX, who were related, "are the popes traditionally held responsible for diverting the great crusade into the narrow channels of European political warfare."²⁰ Innocent was determined to punish those who disobeyed him using even the most extreme measures, such as an excommunication or a crusade, to bring about the desired result. He would offer plenary indulgences to those who joined him in his

¹⁸ Matthew of Westminster The Flowers of History Especially Such As Relate to the Affairs of Britian From the Beginning of the World to the Year 1307 Vol II, tr C. D. Yonge (London, 1853), 101.

¹⁹ M. Creighton, A History of the Papacy from the Great Schism to the Sack of Rome (London, 1899) 22.

²⁰ Elizabeth T. Kennan, "Innocent III, Gregory IX, and Political Crusades: a study in the disintegration of papal power," Reform and Authority in the Medieval and Reformation Church, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle (USA, 1981), 15.

crusades when he had trouble recruiting followers²¹.

Innocent III made productive use of his cardinals. He met with them as often as three times a week.²² He was of the firm opinion that the pope was the ultimate authority in the Church. The cardinals were subservient to the pope. While, he would appoint the cardinals to missions and listen to their advice, he believed the pope was the only one capable of making decisions. Innocent promulgated the idea that the pope was not the "Vicar of Peter" but the "Vicar of Christ"²³. The pope's power and authority came directly from Christ instead of Peter, which made the pope invincible in the eyes of Innocent. This fits into the overall philosophy of Innocent in that he felt that everyone, both secular and clerical, should always submit to the pope.

Christopher R. Cheney describes the policies of Innocent III as not going much

further than his predecessors; but very often, although his doctrinal position was not conspicuously new and he had precedents to work upon, his claims to plenitude of power were clearer and more uncompromising than in the past. He seized more energetically

²¹ Kennan, 16.

²² Christopher R. Cheney; Pope Innocent III and England; (Stuttgart, 1976), 14.

²³ Creighton, 24.

occasions to wield the supreme authority he claimed. New laws and new procedures of Innocent III's devising give the pope a larger part in the affairs of Church government. This is particularly evident in the control of episcopal elections, in the extended use of plenary indulgences in the Crusade, in provisions to benefices, and other developments which were to be of the utmost importance later in the thirteenth century.²⁴

Innocent III was a man who had a vision of where he wanted to go. Had he been a secular ruler, he could have been one of the shrewdest and calculating in history. It is probable that he would have been able to acquire territory with a minimum of effort and would have been one of the best negotiators (or poker players) ever known. Innocent was all bluff and bluster in that he was always negotiating from a position of inherent weakness, his only weapons were pieces of paper. What allowed him to succeed was that he also believed his own propaganda, a victim of hubris. The sheer force of his personality allowed him to hold sway over others and convince the temporal lords of the rightness of his cause. Even though he had no army and no significant backing he was able to transform the papacy into one of the most powerful institutions in the world.

His temper was a serious flaw. It cost him repeatedly with his dealings with King John. He did not understand the English culture, particularly as it related to John's attitude

²⁴ Cheney, 50.

about being excluded from the selection of the most important religious leader in England. It was customary in England for the monarch to select the Archbishop of Canterbury without undue influence to be exerted upon them from Rome. Innocent, in his desire to have absolute obedience, failed to realize that he could accomplish the same result with a gentle hand. It showed the lack of diplomacy and statecraft that is so important for someone in the weaker negotiating position to have. The interdict placed on King John and England in 1208 was probably the result of impetuosity caused by temper or ambition rather than a reasoned response to the objections of a head of state.

Pennington describes Innocent as having "a preeminent place in the theory and practice of papal monarchy. . . . Innocent had upstaged all his fellow pontiffs of the period and most of the canonists. . . . Innocent demands center stage"²⁵ He was an important figure in the establishing the orders of the Dominicans and the Franciscans²⁶. Innocent confirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation or metamorphosis of the eucharistic element. He was truly the "Pontifex Maximus" of his time. He led an exemplary life,

²⁵ Kenneth Pennington, The Papal Monarchy in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Pennsylvania, 1984), 11.

²⁶ Creighton, 21.

perhaps even anticipating the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.²⁷

His influence remains to this day. He was first to mandate a monthly confession²⁸. As was not unusual for Innocent, he took a standard ritual, which for some people was most important and institutionalized it, making it a requirement to stay in the good graces of the Church. In a time where counseling of any kind was unheard of, having someone to talk to must have been a very important part of the average person's life. The confessional was used as a soul-cleansing activity that was (and is) needed by most people. Innocent took this activity and formalized it, making it a required function for all Church members.

Because of Innocent the implications the confession carried with it certainly assumed more importance. If one is confessing, that implies he has done something wrong and he is allowing his confessor to sit in judgment upon him. It gives the confessor great powers over the supposed sinner as this person has to accept the judgment and penance assigned for the sin. This could range from simple "Hail Marys" to more

²⁷ Hans Kühner Encyclopedia of the Papacy, (New York, 1958) tr. Kenneth J. Northcott, 85.

²⁸ At the Lateran Council in 1215.

complex penances, which could involve monetary penalties or pilgrimages. These penances could be severe. Failure to perform the penances could result in exclusion from attending Church services and lack of a Christian burial. These were very important to the average person. Lack of a Christian burial would bring disgrace upon the offenders family for generations. Excommunication was the ultimate penalty and was greatly feared by all. The penalty for failure to observe the confessional rule was to be presumptively charged with heresy.

A. L. Smith outlines how this small rule had a great effect on all phases of life and classes of people.

. . . it gave a much greater efficacy to excommunication, which was now backed up by a real executive officer, the confessor, instead of being left to the uncovenanted discretion of a sheriff. Sins tended to be brought to a level when they were thus regarded prima facie from the standard of obedience to an ecclesiastical authority. Till they have made their submission to the priest, the parricide and the borrower of books from a library-are alike relegated to outer darkness the confessional implied penance, and penances needed to be classified and tabulated, with the consequence that their externality became more and more prominent, to the neglect of their inner significance. The outward act, often a trivial penalty . . . came to be regarded as everything; and the true and lively faith, -without which good works are but filthy rags, had to be reasserted, even with overemphasis. Here, again, is the nemesis awaiting attempts to stereotype religion into a cut-and-dried set of rules. Thus the passionate impulse of the Middle Ages to realize its ideals and to embody them in a material form ended in a vast system of indulgence and an undisguised tariff of sins

. . . the Church shifted its praecium. In the earlier centuries she had aimed at permeating European society with Christianity, . . . at interpenetrating society, law, and even politics, as well as art and literature, with the principles of religion . . . from the middle of the thirteenth century the aim was less religious than hierarchical; it implied the domination of Church over State, and of clergy over laity, the demonstration of the civil power's derivation from ecclesiastical, even the substitution of Church law for secular . . . Innocent's goal was to set up the population to be completely subservient to the Church and to have the clerics to be subservient to the Church leaders above them.²⁹

The appointment of a required confessor as a necessity for all of the populace and clergy marked the beginning of a new step in the dominate role the Church wanted to assume over its subjects. It wanted to exert its control in all aspects of life. In order to accomplish this, the Church required its subjects to give the Church control over what was right and wrong in everyday life. Morality became what the Church dictated it to be. If the Church was allowed, through the confessional, to regulate the small things in life, then it became natural to do the same with major decisions. The Church, in effect, was trying to become a shadow government for the individual as well as the monarch. If the confessional becomes an integral part of an individual's life and the penance assigned for minor offences assumes importance, then the more serious forms of discipline

²⁹ A. L. Smith, Church and State in the Middle Ages the Ford Lectures delivered at Oxford in 1905 (Oxford, 1913), 52-54.

become even more momentous and threatening. The object is to have the fear of lack of salvation to be such an overriding fear that whatever the Church desires and dictates becomes a necessity, not an option.

It is appropriate to describe the other tools in Innocent's kit that he used against his flock to force obedience. The interdict was another weapon of purely spiritual value. A form of discipline used by the Church not infrequently, the interdict is not as well known as excommunication. While this is not a thesis on the interdict, a brief explanation of its uses and purposes is appropriate nevertheless, as Innocent III made extensive use of the interdict, placing it or threatening to place an interdict at least eighty-five times³⁰. Of those eighty-five occurrences, twelve of those or a little less than fifteen percent were directed at England. This works out to an average of almost five interdicts a year threatened or issued by Innocent with almost one of those each year being against England. The frequency, with which he had to use one of his most powerful weapons, shows how tenuous the sway that the papacy held over its subjects was.

Whereas excommunication is almost always (there is a general excommunication)

³⁰ Edward B. Krehbiel, The Interdict Its History And Operation (Washington, 1909), 86.

directed against an individual, an interdict is always territorial. An interdict is placed against people that fall within certain borders or specified boundaries. Perhaps this is due to the fact that originally interdicts were under the supervision of the bishops and were limited to the area of a bishopric. It could involve only one Church or the entire bishopric. It was adopted by the papacy in the time of Leo IX.³¹ An interdict limited the services available to the local populace from the Church. The restrictiveness of the prohibition, as to what sacraments were permitted, when they were permitted or how often they were permitted, all varied as to what period of history is being talked about and how serious the interdict was. Typically, the earlier interdicts were more severe than later ones.

Unlike excommunication, an interdict did not prevent someone from achieving the Kingdom of Heaven, but made their life somewhat miserable in that the comfort and nurturing of the Church was generally unavailable to them. Typically Baptisms were allowed, usually less often or in other restricted ways, marriages were permitted but not blessed and burials were not blessed by the Church. As eternal salvation was the only bright spot in many a poor peasant's life, an interdict could be devastating to the true

³¹ Krehbiel, 8.

believers and devout followers of the faith. This, of course, is what the Church was hoping for and encouraged the populace to put pressure on the offending party, usually someone of importance, to right the supposed wrong that had created the interdict in the first place.

The papacy was at this time an Italian institution. The election of Innocent III took place on January 8, 1198. Roger de Hoveden describes the selection in the following way:

. . . John of Salerno, cardinal priest, titular of Saint Stephen in Monte Celi, and legate of the Apostolic See in Scotland, Ireland, and the lands adjacent, came to York. Although he had been one of the two selected for the office of Roman Pontiff after the decease of pope Celestinus, he declined the election, although ten cardinals would have agreed to his election; and he, with the other cardinals, elected Lothaire, cardinal deacon, Pontiff of Rome, under the name of pope Innocent the Third.³²

He was thirty-seven years of age. He was a lawyer by training and also a studied

³²The Annals of Roger de Hoveden. Comprising the History of England and of Other Countries of Europe from A. D. 732 to A. D. 1201 tr Henry T. Riley (London, 1853), 531-532.

theologian. Complaints were made about his youth,³³ but none were made about his lack of intellect or desire. He had been Cardinal of San Sergio. His given name was Lothario, Count of Segni. He was the nephew of Pope Clement III.³⁴ He was Italian. The papacy had become a good ole boys club with relatives and allies succeeding each other to the office. Men were selected because of their genealogical qualifications, their Italianess and their political connections, not because of their religious qualities and qualifications.

This way of doing business held for all of the thirteenth century. The papacy became

³³ Kühner, 84-85.

³⁴ I am suspicious that the term "nephew" had often become a euphemism for "son" in the married clergy, it is not totally clear what the actual parentage of Innocent was. He was one of the staunchest foes of married clergy during his reign as pope, frequently stating that the clergy should not be married or have mistresses. When benefices were no longer allowed to be passed to "sons", the benefices began to be passed to "nephews". As these offices usually had property and income and often secular power along with ecclesiastical power, keeping this in the family was of utmost importance as the entire family may be dependent upon this office for their livelihood. One cannot help but question what the relationship really was. Was the papacy just another of the offices that was being passed from father to son? The Latin word nepos can also be translated as nephew, grandson, or a descendant (see D. A. Simpson, Cassell's Latin Dictionary (New York, 1959), p 391.) which adds to the ambiguity of the term.

just like any other monarchy, it was to be kept in the family. Of the popes elected in the thirteenth century, many were related or had relatives who had held the office. While not all the popes of the thirteenth century were Italian, the office never seemed to stray far from the ruling families of Italy.

Chapter III

King John

After examining the papacy at the beginning of the thirteenth century and the methods employed for control of the masses and their leaders, perhaps an analysis of Innocent's opposition in England is in order. King John was a man who probably never thought that he would become king in his lifetime. He had two older brothers, one of which had a son. His predecessor was a virile warrior, who was young and would probably produce many heirs. There were others that may have had more claim than John if something were to happen to Richard. Suddenly John was cast into the limelight and through some good fortune became the undisputed monarch of England. His only opposition was Arthur, a nephew³⁵, who died under suspicious circumstances after foolishly placing himself in harm's way.

John has come down through history as a scoundrel, a libertine and a cruel sadist.

Matthew of Westminster describes John and his England:

³⁵ James W. Alexander, Ranulf of Chester (Athens, Georgia, 1983), 14.

England was laid under an interdict for seven years, and for an equal length of time was subjected to the horrors of civil war; and at length, by the inactivity of king John, who was at that time king, it was reduced to become a tributary state. The same king John lost Normandy and many other territories beyond the sea, and made England and Ireland subject to pope Innocent the Third, and burdened them with the payment of tribute³⁶

This is typical of the quotes that are easy to find about John. Matthew of Westminster seems to be particularly venomous about John as he had earlier written with the following "list of sins" all in one paragraph:

In the meantime the king kept on oppressing one or other of the nobles of the kingdom, either by extorting money from them unjustly, or by stripping them of their privileges or properties; of some he seduced the wives, or deflowered the daughters, so that he became manifestly and notoriously odious and detestable both to God and man. Moreover, that his insatiable avarice and unappeasable gluttony and licentiousness might be concealed from no one, he prohibited all fowling and taking of winged game, and prevented the nobles from hunting, by which measures he not only lost the affections of all men, but incurred their inextinguishable hatred; so that even his own wife detested and loathed him; whom he, though an adulterer himself, accused of adultery, and he put to an ignominious death those whom he suspected of familiarities with her; and he ordered the queen herself to be kept in close custody. And, among other flagitious crimes, he, like a second Herod, ordered a great many innocent boys, who were hostages at Nottingham, to be

³⁶ Matthew of Westminster, 312.

hanged on a gallows; on which account all his subjects, both English and foreigners, wishing to shake off the intolerable yoke of such a tyrant, began seriously to consider what prince there was in whose bosom they might a refuge.³⁷

This account tells of his lustful behavior, his cruelty and his mistreatment of the nobility, all of which led to rebellion. His contemporaries did not like him and it is not surprising that this has followed him to the present day. However, most of the modern day attitudes about John may have been the result of the influence of two nineteenth century Victorian historians, William Stubbs and J. R. Green, colleagues who wrote disparagingly about John and who were required reading for a generation of English schoolboys.³⁸ Since that time, historians usually paint King John as the rotten apple of

³⁷ Matthew of Westminster, 108.

³⁸ In his History of the English People Vol I (New York, 1900) p. 234., John Richard Green says about John, "Vile as he was. . .", not an unbiased view. Sharon Turner in History of England From The Norman Conquest to the Accession of Edward the First (London, 1814), 345., describes John: "In the depraved character of John, there seems less than the usual mixture of qualities on which, even in bad men, some panegyric may be founded. Gross in his appetites, obstinate in self-will, furious in his anger, slothful, debauched, tyrannical, and pusillanimous; his defects were not relieved by any mental capacity or social attainments. They were aggravated by the display of a disposition both cruel and unprincipled."

M. T. Clanchy, England and its Rulers 1066- 1272 (Tottowa, New Jersey, 1983), 32., notes that Stubbs and Green were required reading for English schoolboys and thus had an undue influence on the future historians who were to write about John.

English monarchs. This labeling of John tends to put him in a bad light in his dealings with the Church or anybody else. Of course the modern Robin Hood legend tends to prejudice most people today about John even before they start to study him. Before beginning to discuss John and his relationship with the papacy, it is necessary to put some of these impressions of him in perspective.

He had five known illegitimate children and the chronicles refer to his licentious behavior³⁹ If he was as promiscuous as he was claimed to be, his illegitimate children would have been more numerous and notorious. There is another question as to whether this was unusual behavior for this time. Sidney Painter comments:

Now licentiousness was no novel accusation against an English king. It was freely brought against both Henry I and John. I know of no contemporary suggestion that the amorous activities of either Henry disturbed their vassals though the rumor that Henry II had seduced Alis of France, fiancé of his son Richard, was probably one reason for Richard's disinclination to marry her.⁴⁰

If King Henry II, John's father, was seducing the intended of his own son, John's

³⁹ Matthew of Westminster, 114. This is only one of many passages referring to John's sexual exploits with the wives and daughters of his nobles. Matthew says he was accusing his nobles of treason, the very ones "whose wives, as he used to boast, he had violated, and whose daughters he had deflowered."

⁴⁰ Painter, 68.

brother, how could a noble expect the king to behave any differently with the noble's kin?

While this may not have been behavior that endeared the kings to their vassals, it was not unexpected or out of the ordinary either. Had the nobles been that upset or offended, had they been the jealous husband or outraged father, the chronicles would be full of tales of the beatings of the wives and daughters for allowing this to happen. If it were a true seduction (where the woman actually had a choice in the matter, versus the seduction where she had an obligation to fulfill and was left no choice in the matter), the cuckolded men would have taken their revenge on the women. If it were part of the job of being a family of nobility, then the availability of the women to the lord was expected. The fact that there is not any stories of wives being beaten or worse by jealous husbands, indicates that this was not unusual and may have been expected behavior. The noble then would have had the same rights on his estates with his own vassals. For a monk who was supposed to remain celibate, this may have seemed offensive, for the people involved it was business as usual. There have been many well known English monarchs or heirs to the throne with multiple mistresses. John's problem may have been his inability to keep his mouth shut. John also had to have almost no charm or charisma. It appears that he was universally disliked. That goes a long way to

explaining the feelings about him.

He also divorced his wife, Hawisa, daughter of William, Earl of Gloucester and married Isabel, the daughter of Ailmer, count of Angoulême. John had become smitten with this girl who was only twelve years old and had determined to have her as his wife. She had been pledged to Hugh Le Brun, Count de la Marche, on the advice from Richard, John's brother to Philip, king of France. She was living in the household of Hugh Le Brun awaiting for her to reach a marriageable age⁴¹. Because of her youth, Hugh had refused to marry her. After learning John was infatuated with Isabel, her father removed her from Hugh Le Brun's household and gave her to John in marriage.⁴² This was a twelve-year-old girl. She was not yet pubescent, as she did not begin to have children for several years. While this marriage may not have seemed extraordinary to John's contemporaries, as none of the chroniclers addresses it in terms of outrage at his desiring a physically immature twelve year old, later historians, particularly those from the Victorian era, must have been appalled at this marriage and may have had trouble dealing with this fact.

⁴¹ Roger de Hoveden, 483.

⁴² Ibid

His cruelty is attributed, for the most part, to four incidents; the death of his nephew Arthur⁴³, the starvation death of the wife and son of William de Brause⁴⁴, the hanging of 28 hostages, and the death of the Archdeacon of Norwich under a cope of lead.⁴⁵

These events are the ones that tend to be repeated whenever John's cruelty is

⁴³ Roger of Wendover, 205., describes a meeting with John and Arthur shortly after Arthur's capture. "After some lapse of time, king John came to the castle of Falaise, and ordered his nephew Arthur to be brought into his presence; when he appeared, the king addressed him kindly, and promised him many honours, asking him to separate himself from the French king, and to adhere to the side of himself, as his lord and uncle. But Arthur illadvisedly replied to him with indignation said threats, and demanded of the king that he should give up to him the kingdom of England, with all the territories, which king Richard possessed at the time of his death; and, since all those possessions belonged to him by hereditary right, he affirmed with an oath, that unless king John quickly restored the aforesaid territories to him, he should never enjoy peace for any length of time. The king was much troubled at hearing his words, and gave orders that Arthur should be sent to Rouen, to be imprisoned in the new tower there, and kept closely guarded; but shortly afterwards the said Arthur suddenly disappeared." Would any other monarch (thirteenth century or otherwise) have acted any differently than John?

⁴⁴ Matthew of Westminster, 112. Matthew states "The same year, Matilda, a woman of the noblest birth, the wife of William de Brause, and William her son and the heir of her husband, at the command of John, king of England, were miserably put to death by famine." The cruelty of the death is what is roundly condemned. John probably felt he was setting a strong example to a nobility that was becoming increasingly troublesome. This woman had also insulted John before her imprisonment according to Roger of Wendover, 248.

⁴⁵ Roger of Wendover, 251. This occurred during the interdict. The Bishop of Norwich had decided to leave the country after the excommunication of John. He departed the king's court without permission after telling someone of his plans. The king had him arrested, put in chains and placed in prison. After a few days a cap of lead was placed over him and eventually was starved and

mentioned. While historians for these incidents have roundly condemned John, his brother Richard slew 2600 Moslem followers of Saladin at one time.⁴⁶ This contrasts with the 28 Welsh hostages that John hung at Nottingham that helped earn him his black reputation. Rarely is this slaughter of prisoners written about in the same tone as John's offenses were. Of course these men, SLAIN BY Richard, were not Englishmen nor were they Christians.

As far as being a scoundrel goes, most historians cite the above incidents as proof positive that John was indeed a incorrigible, evil man. While his behavior cannot be excused in modern day terms, it was not at all out of line for the thirteenth century. John was purposefully setting an example in each of the incidents attributed to his cruelty.

He would not have been an effective king if he had not done away with Arthur. He

crushed by the lead.

⁴⁶ Roger of Wendover, 105.

The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First, ed John T. Appleby (London, 1963), 99. Richard states "The necessity for guarding so large a number of prisoners (Richard in a letter to the abbot of Clairvaux put their number at about twenty-six hundred) tied Richard's hands from further operations. He accordingly had them all slaughtered, except for a few of the most illustrious, like Meshtub, who were held for ransom." This has hardly raised an eyebrow among historians who seem to be overly concerned with John's cruelty.

could not afford to have a pretender to the throne, who was not his faithful ally, dogging his footsteps and constantly posing a threat. Had John died an early death, as he did, Arthur, a much younger man, may have displaced John's heirs. The Welsh hostages were taken to prevent their fathers from attacking John's lands. The fathers had started to attack and John did what was done in those days to hostages whose families refused to meet the terms of the agreement agreed to with the hostage taker.⁴⁷ Their families should be condemned before John. Obviously the fathers of those boys felt them to be expendable. There were similar justifications in each of the other instances. There is not any abundant evidence that John engaged in cruelty and sadism on a regular basis but used it to obtain a desired result to improve his position as monarch or to set examples for others who may desire to betray him in similar ways.

If John is examined as a man of his times, rather than a man of OUR times, it is difficult to paint him completely black. After all, none of his confrontations with the Church and Innocent III had anything to do with his cruelty or his sexual behavior. It says more about the Church and Innocent III and the Church's failure to act and condemn John

⁴⁷ Turner, 345.

Matthew of Westminster, 109.

Roger of Wendover, 257.

than it does about John if, indeed, he was a cruel, heartless, and adulterous man in thirteenth century terms as he has been accused.

All of his serious confrontations with the Church came from his failure to obey and offer submission to the pope. John believed that religious motives had no place in his dealings with the church and papacy.⁴⁸ This difference between John and Innocent in their views of how the transactions between Church and state were to take place, was where all of John's problems with the papacy originated. John could not understand (nor did he want to understand) the mindset of Innocent and his perspective on the role of ecclesiastical government.

We begin the thirteenth century with a pope who is determined to increase the power and prestige of the papacy at the expense of the legitimate rulers. He had no conception of the world outside of the Church. Innocent was a man who understood the exigencies of the Church government but was not so astute in his comprehension of the secular world. It is apparent he never thought about the needs of the monarchs and the political niceties of diplomacy. He firmly believed that the Church was all powerful and

⁴⁸ Cheney, 14.

deserved the utmost respect and obedience from its secular slaves. Green has described Innocent's attitude very aptly "Innocent was dreaming of a vast Christian Empire with the Pope at its head to enforce justice and religion on his under-kings"⁴⁹.

At the same time, England had a monarch who never expected to be a monarch, who had never been a religious man and who had only two things on his mind; the consolidation of power and the enjoyment of life as only an absolute monarch could. He was destined to discover that he was never to achieve very much of either.

⁴⁹ Green, 248.

Chapter IV

The Conflict

One important thing to remember is that Innocent III was trained as a lawyer. As such his mind worked as that of a lawyer's as much as a cleric. We have a lot of the letters Innocent wrote to England. It becomes apparent early on that dealing with Innocent was akin to dealing with a modern day lawyer, like a dog with an old shoe. Once he got hold of an idea or decided on a mission, Innocent mustered all around for support of his task. He was a prodigious letter writer, with letters coming rapidly out of Rome for everyone even remotely concerned with a problem.

Another significant problem was that Rome was at least a month away from England. If the pope wrote a letter or issued a ruling on a matter, it took a month or six weeks to get the information to England, and another month to six weeks to return the reply. That is if there were no problems with weather, robbers, war, pestilence or other phenomena that could delay or cause the communication to be lost.⁵⁰ This made communications

⁵⁰ Cheney, 9. Cheney describes the communication problem with Rome:" The fastest messenger would take most of a month cover the 1100 miles between Rome and Canterbury. In consequence, instructions sent by the pope to agents in

difficult. In the first confrontation John had with Innocent, Innocent thought he was dealing with Richard who had died since the incident had begun. Modern day historians have to adjust their thinking to try and appreciate the problems associated with this long delay.

The papacy tended to use this difficulty to its advantage. As most significant cases needed to be pleaded in person, the distance and hardship of the journey made it very troublesome to carry on any kind of discourse with the pope. Monarchs were not going to travel to Rome. Normally they sent representatives who were authorized to speak for them. These representatives could only do the things authorized and could not usually negotiate as effectively as the ruler himself could have. This put the pope at a distinct advantage in these kinds of negotiations. As we will see this could be a big problem.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address every request for funds coming from Rome to England, either for the crusades or for normal maintenance of the papacy. That could be another study by itself. Only major topics will be dealt with.

England were often so out-of-date to be useless when they arrived." This was the fastest messenger if they had no interference. Papal legates and delegations from England made up of old men who could not travel rapidly took longer. Many messages were lost.

Freeman Mendell

The first instance of papal intervention during the reign of King John came as soon as he had taken office in 1199. King Richard had taken Philip of Beauvais prisoner during fighting in Normandy. As he was taken prisoner while fighting under arms, Richard and later John, did not consider Philip of Beauvais a clergyman prisoner but rather a soldier prisoner, even though he held a bishopric.⁵¹ Philip of Capua, a papal legate, threatened to place all of Normandy under an interdict unless the prisoner was released. John demanded a ransom of two thousand marks for expenses incurred. When this was paid the prisoner was freed.⁵²

This episode shows how frivolously an interdict could be used and how little King John was upset by the threat of it. He waited for his money and eventually got it. The papacy seemed to have a rather heavy hand when it came to negotiation. The legate and the pope were ready to drop their trump card early on rather than spend any time attempting

⁵¹ William Prynne, An Exact Chronological Vindication and Historical demonstration of Our British, Roman, Saxon, Danish, Norman, English Kings Supreme Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction over all Prelate, Persons, Causes,, within their Kingdoms and Dominions (London, 1666) as cited by Krehbiel, 110.

⁵² Roger de Hoveden, 462.

to use diplomacy.

Richard had had a falling out with his half brother, Geoffrey, the Archbishop of York in 1196 and had "disseized Geoffrey of his ecclesiastical estates and temporal functions"⁵³. When Innocent came to the papacy he determined to put Geoffrey back in his rightful place as Archbishop of York. Richard died on April 6. On April 28, 1199, Innocent sent Richard a series of letters advising him that if he did not put Geoffrey back in office, all of York, then all of England would be put under interdict.⁵⁴ Richard died before the letters were even written. John very quickly came to an agreement with his half brother.

Geoffrey then accompanied John to Normandy on his campaigns there. Hubert archbishop of Canterbury and Geoffrey Fitz-Peter, the king's justiciar, warned the king

⁵³ Krehbiel, 90.

⁵⁴ C. R. Cheney and Mary G. Cheney, The Letters of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) Concerning England and Wales, A Calendar With an Appendix of Texts (Oxford, 1967), 19-20. (The Cheneyes cite the original source for each letter as well as a physical description of the document and its condition.) On that one day, Innocent sent six letters to England five of them dealing with the problem with Richard and Geoffrey, one dealing with normal Church business.

not to let Geoffrey of York return to England, as he would bring war.⁵⁵ The dispute over York had never been completely settled. Geoffrey returned to England and in 1200 John ordered Geoffrey to join him again in Normandy. Geoffrey refused and John "deprived [Geoffrey] of all the emoluments of his archbishopric"⁵⁶ There were several reasons for this action. The first was for disobedience, the second was that Geoffrey refused to let John collect a tax as had been collected all over England to support John in his campaigns, and lastly Geoffrey had placed all of the county of York under an interdict and excommunicated the king's men. These men had been trying to collect the tax. Geoffrey and John eventually made up at Mid-Lent 1201 with Geoffrey paying a fine.⁵⁷ A few months later in May, John restored the properties to his brother.⁵⁸

This settlement may not have been accidental, as just before John and Geoffrey made up, Innocent had written Geoffrey a letter rebuking him for his action in placing the interdict without consulting the papacy. Apparently Geoffrey had also extorted money from some of the churches he had put under interdict or had threatened to put under

⁵⁵ Roger de Hoveden, 464.

⁵⁶ Roger of Wendover, 193.

⁵⁷ Roger de Hoveden, 518.

⁵⁸ Roger de Hoveden, 522.

interdict. Innocent instructed Geoffrey to return the money and to repeal all sentences of excommunication and suspension. Innocent warned Geoffrey of further sanctions if he disobeyed and did not settle the problem.⁵⁹ Clearly, the pope is making a statement that in the case of a major row where interdicts are to be issued and excommunications given, the papacy had better be involved. An action (interdict) that had started out as a bishops prerogative is now totally under the control of the pope. Geoffrey's mistake was not in doing what he did, but in not getting his actions approved and allowing Rome to issue the instructions. This was a subtle but important shift in Church policy and a transfer of power to the central authority. This action was not taken so much in support of John as it was taken by Innocent to establish the precedent of having the ultimate approval of any interdict that was to be issued by a bishop.

In 1203 John had retained some of the property of the bishopric of Séez in Normandy. He refused to acknowledge Silvester as the Bishop of Séez because he had been consecrated by the Archbishop of Sens rather than by the Archbishop of Rouen. Innocent threatened to put the lands of the Archbishop of Rouen under an interdict if John did not relinquish those lands that he had seized. John must have accepted the

⁵⁹ C. R. and Mary G. Cheney, 47.,
Also Roger de Hoveden, 518-520.

decision of the pope as Silvester became Bishop of Séez⁶⁰.

In 1197 Richard had expropriated the lands of the Archbishop of Dublin after exiling the Archbishop⁶¹. The pope urged both Richard and John to return the lands. By 1203 the pope wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely⁶² and to King John urging John to return the lands or to have an ambulatory interdict placed upon him. John and the pope eventually came to agreement in 1205⁶³.

On June 29, 1205 Hubert Archbishop of Canterbury died. The monks of Canterbury met in secret and elected one of their own to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, the most powerful religious office in England. The monks were afraid that if they notified the king, he would not let them have a say in who was to be archbishop. The plan was for the new archbishop-elect to travel in secret to Rome and become confirmed before John was aware of the situation. John would then have to agree to the election or so the

⁶⁰ Krehbiel, 89.

⁶¹ Roger de Hoveden, 408.

⁶² C. R. and M. G. Cheney, 78.

⁶³ Krehbiel, 92.

monks hoped.⁶⁴

The plan went awry when the archbishop-elect, Reginald, started bragging to anyone who would listen in Flanders that he was to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury. He had given an oath to the monks at Canterbury that he would not consider himself official, and therefore would keep his mouth shut, until the pope made it official. There were several reasons for this. The king, naturally, wanted a say as to who was to hold the most powerful office in England. The king needed someone he could work with, preferably someone he could trust - in other words a hand-picked candidate. No doubt John had memories of Becket and the nightmares that it caused his father. In the Autobiography of Giraldus Cambrensis, Gerald says that John summoned a council at Oxford and "hearing that Master Stephen Langton had meanwhile been elected Archbishop of Canterbury at Rome, . . . he began to complain of the troubles and wrongs that had been put upon himself and his father by the Archbishops of Canterbury"⁶⁵. This statement shows the cynicism and mistrust that John felt towards

⁶⁴ Matthew of Westminster, 102.

⁶⁵ C. R. Cheney and Mary G. Cheney, The Letters of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) Concerning England and Wales, A Calendar With an Appendix of Texts (Oxford, 1967), 352.

the Church and its representatives.⁶⁶

On the road to Rome, Reginald was less than circumspect about his nomination. He was showing his letters of election to anyone who would listen. By the time he got to Rome, the monks had heard about his deeds and panicked. Fearful for their own safety and that of their property and families, they immediately went to John and asked for advice on electing a new archbishop. John indicated that John de Grey, bishop of Norwich would be an excellent choice. The monks of Canterbury immediately confirmed this. Meanwhile, Innocent was putting off Reginald⁶⁷.

Innocent wanted to take this matter under advisement⁶⁸, in other words he also realized the value of this office and if he had one of his own men in there he could have a foot up in controlling England and achieving his goal of secular subordination to the papacy. His problem was complicated. He had to have someone he could trust, who was from England, and who had sufficient stature that it would not look too much like a political appointment. This was an appointment that only came about once in a great while and it

⁶⁶ Cheney, 14.

⁶⁷ Roger of Wendover, 216-216.

had to be dealt with properly.

John, meanwhile, was going ahead with the installation of John de Grey. He felt it was his prerogative according to canon law to select the archbishop and he proceeded accordingly. A second delegation was sent to the Pope presenting John de Grey as the choice of the monks of Canterbury. Reasons were presented as to why Reginald's appointment should be voided. The pope annulled both elections. Innocent then forbade either nominee from seeking that office again. The monks then admitted that King John had agreed to accept whomever the monks elected. (Both John and the monks had agreed that John de Grey was the only qualified choice, this probably was not communicated to the pope.) Innocent then coerced the monks⁶⁹ (only one dissented⁷⁰) into accepting Stephen Langton as their choice for Archbishop of Canterbury.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Matthew of Westminster, 102-103.

⁶⁹ The monks were no doubt in awe of their surroundings. The power of the pontificate and of the personality of Innocent must have subdued any thoughts they may have had about defying the wishes of the pope. Innocent was not above implying many things about rewards and punishments for those who did or did not obey him.

⁷⁰ Matthew of Westminster, 107.

Innocent's choice of Langton was an unfortunate, but predictable one. Christopher R.

Cheney describes innocent's exposure to Englishmen and English problems:

He associated with one or two English scholars of distinction when in France, and continued or renewed these links when he became pope. But who were these men? Stephen Langton, Robert Courson, Gervase abbot of Premontre-Englishmen who left England in their early years to take careers abroad, ill-qualified to give the pope an accurate picture of English Church and its most prominent men. In Bologna Lothario [Innocent III] doubtless met other Englishmen, but he was not there for long. The Curia which he returned in 1185 was already staffed mainly by Italians. Innocent III moved mainly among Italians, and was confronted throughout pontificate with pressing Italian problems.⁷²

This did not bode well for John and he knew it. Stephen Langton was an old school chum of Innocent's, but this did not make him the most qualified candidate for the highest religious office in England. He was well qualified in a religious sense to be the Archbishop of Canterbury, as he had had a distinguished career as a professor of theology at the University of Paris, he had been a canon of York and a member of the papal court. All of this was well and good, but it presented several problems to John.

First, a king of England could not let anyone dictate an election as important as the

⁷¹ Roger of Wendover, 238.

⁷² Cheney, 9.

Archbishop of Canterbury. Innocent should have known this. There was no practical reason not to go with the election of John de Grey. He may not have been as qualified religiously as Stephen Langton, but he certainly was acceptable. John de Grey was Bishop of Norwich, a small bishopric and probably was thought of as very provincial by Innocent. Second, John could not afford to have someone who had obvious loyalties to the pope to be in the most powerful religious office in the country. The Archbishop of Canterbury needed to represent John and England to the pope rather than to be the pope's emissary in England, at least in the eyes of John. Langton had not lived in England very much at all since he was an adult and his patriotism and loyalties were in question when it came to choosing between his friend and (in Langton's view) superior, Innocent, and his monarch and country. John did not like the fact that Stephen Langton had consorted with the French Court while living in Paris.⁷³ Lastly John could not allow this precedent of an outside appointment of such a critical office to take place. This would be dangerous as there was no telling where it would stop.

Innocent sent John a letter asking him to accept Stephen Langton, along with gifts of four rings made of gold and jewels. The gifts tarnished quickly in the eyes of John. He

⁷³ Roger of Wendover, 240.

then proceeded to attack the monks of Canterbury for spending his money on their mission and then betraying him. John then sent knights to Canterbury and had the monks exiled under pain of death if they refused. The monks went to Flanders.⁷⁴ John then sent letters to the pope expressing his displeasure at the appointment of Langton, threatening to stop all payments going to Rome from England and institute a blockade by sea so Rome could not receive monies collected for it.⁷⁵

Innocent tried to sooth John and asked him via letter to accept Stephen. When this did not work, part of Innocent's response was to write two letters on August 27, 1207. The first was to William Bishop of London, Eustace Bishop of Ely and Mauger Bishop of Worcester. In this letter Innocent instructed the bishops to "bid the king receive the archbishop. Otherwise they are to publish throughout England general sentence of interdict.[allowing no sacraments except] baptism. . .and confession of the dying."⁷⁶ The pope threatened more severe penalties if John does not accept Langton. The second letter orders Gilbert Bishop of Rochester to excommunicate the knights who forced the monks of Canterbury out of their monastery, robbed them and ran them out of England.

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid, 241.

The knights must come to Rome for forgiveness after making restitution⁷⁷. This enraged John. He swore at the clergymen and threatened to have all clergy thrown out of the country if an interdict was placed upon England.⁷⁸

The battle continued to escalate. Both parties felt they had too much to lose to give in. Innocent was acting according to canon law and John acted according to his traditions which to him constitute the law. The loser in this battle was Innocent. His goal should have been to increase his power when he could and to continually look for opportunities to do so. Once again he had decided to flex his muscles rather than to use his brain. It would have cost nothing for Innocent to have consulted with John over his choice, it probably would have increased his standing in John's eyes. Instead Innocent chose a head on confrontation because he was trying to make a politically correct choice and place his man on the inside. His action was premature. Now he had a full fledged war on his hands with one of the strongest monarchs in Europe, someone Innocent wants as a sponsor, not an enemy. There was nothing wrong with the choice of John de Grey if the goal of Innocent is to live in harmony with King John. Langton was the choice for a

⁷⁶ C. R. and M. G. Cheney, 126.

⁷⁷ Ibid

pope who was much more powerful than Innocent was at this time. A pope who actually had already tamed the monarch and who was confident that his (Innocent's) role of a superior was acceptable to the king.

John's response was somewhat predictable. When the bishops came to him to inform him of Innocent's orders, John began swearing at them. Roger of Wendover paints a picture of whining, crying men who are virtually on their bellies begging John to cooperate.⁷⁹ If these men had such fear of John, their fear of Innocent must have been greater. It is not recorded that these bishops tried to persuade Innocent to change his mind. They promised John everything that men of God could, mostly glory and love. John responded "by God's teeth . . . if they or any other priests soever presumptively dared to lay his dominions under an interdict"⁸⁰ he would confiscate all their property and send them all packing to the pope⁸¹. He also threatened with blinding and disfigurement any representative of the pope found on English soil. The brave bishops left John's presence immediately and on March 23, 1208 they placed all of England under an

⁷⁸ Roger of Wendover, 244.

⁷⁹Ibid, 245.

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid, 245-246.

interdict and quickly left England.⁸²

John then ordered all ecclesiastical revenues to be seized, commanded that all the clergy to leave England, and had all the property of the clerics converted to his use⁸³. John's inventiveness became apparent when he kidnapped for ransom the concubines of the priests and clerks⁸⁴. This presented quite a dilemma for the ecclesiastics as Church forbade them from keeping concubines. They could not complain or even mention it to Innocent. It was quite an ingenious way to not only punish the clergy but to also raise money. The fact that most of these women must have had children made it even more imperative that they be ransomed quickly with very little haggling. There is no reason to believe that these men had any less affection for their families than any other men of their time.

John also encouraged the mugging of any cleric found on the road. Roger of Wendover describes John's reaction when the servants of a sheriff from Wales brought in a robber arrested for robbing and murdering a priest on the road. When John was asked what he

⁸² Ibid, 246.

⁸³ Matthew of Westminster, 112.

wanted to do with the bound man, he replied "He has slain an enemy of mine, release him and let him go"⁸⁵. This story must have traveled like wildfire around England. The churchmen had to have had fear struck into their hearts with such a verdict. This ruling by John gave license to criminals of all types to declare all men of the cloth fair game. Many that had not left England by that time then left. The relatives of the bishops and archbishops who had placed the interdict on England were arrested and stripped of their possessions. Meanwhile the prelates were living in luxury on the continent⁸⁶.

John had upped the stakes another level. By allowing common criminals to prey on men of the church and their relations with impunity, he had essentially issued a death warrant for those men and their families. It shows to what extremes that he was willing to go to win this battle of wills. John was afraid that Innocent would excommunicate him and his nobles would cease to obey him. It was a very real fear and surely Innocent began contemplating it as soon as he heard about John's reaction to the interdict. John demanded hostages from his nobles in case the pope excommunicated him. This

⁸⁴ Roger of Wendover, 246.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 247.

⁸⁶ Ibid

excommunication would allow the nobles to renounce their vows of homage and fealty⁸⁷, a very serious situation. In John's mind, the hostages would prevent the nobles from disavowing their oaths to him.

John appeared to be doing a good job of anticipating Innocent and setting in place a system of government that would allow him to function effectively no matter what Innocent might do. There is no indication that John was thinking beyond the immediate future. He viewed this as a war but he had not thought out a battle plan nor had he any idea how to resolve the situation. He was in a reactive mode. Even though he was anticipating his opponent, it was impossible for him to figure out a way to defeat Innocent. All John could hope for was that he could outlast him. It should have been obvious to John that Innocent was not going to let this happen. There was no reason for him to allow John to win.

The two antagonists began to circle each other. Both were starting to form alliances that would assist them in their cause. As stated earlier, in 1209 John gave his nephew Otto a generous gift. By 1210 Otto had been excommunicated by the pope over the

⁸⁷ Matthew of Westminster, 113.

possession of some castles and lands Innocent had acquired in the Holy Roman Empire prior to Otto becoming the Holy Roman Emperor⁸⁸. John, also in 1209, signed a treaty with the king of the Scots after receiving a large sum of money and two hostages from the Scottish king in order to prevent John from attacking him. John then demanded and received fealty from all his free tenants, boys over the age of twelve and the Welsh did homage to him at a great price⁸⁹.

John was on a rampage that continued for two years. He was busy trying to insure loyalty from all those he felt necessary to maintain his kingdom in the face of an excommunication. During this time Matthew of Westminster describes his behavior as increasingly oppressive, seducing the wives, deflowering the daughters, and robbing the nobles of their rights and property⁹⁰. John had not been making friends with this behavior. His subjects were understandably upset. This would come back to haunt him in the years to come.

In 1210 Pandulph, the sub-deacon of the pope, and Durand had tried to treat with John

⁸⁸ Roger of Wendover, 253.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 249.

to no avail. The pope then released all of John's subjects from their oaths of fealty⁹¹. In 1212 Stephen Langton, William the Bishop of London and Eustace the Bishop of Ely went to Innocent and informed him of all the cruelty and rebellions that were going on in England. Innocent then decided to depose John, the ultimate penalty. Innocent decided he would choose John's successor. He also declared the equivalent of a crusade against John by asking all the rulers of Europe to join the king of France in a war against John⁹². This set Philip of France to action. There was nothing more that he wanted than to conquer England, his constant foe.

In the meantime, Pandulph had asked Innocent that if he, Pandulph, could get John to repent, could John be forgiven? The pope assented⁹³. At last one of the protagonists was going to offer the other a way out. Innocent was not changing any condition he had ever made but he was going to give John a way of saving face. Innocent knew that replacing John would be tricky at best. If he were unsuccessful in his attempt at deposition, it could fatally weaken the papacy. Actually trying to force John from the

⁹⁰ Matthew of Westminster, 112.

⁹¹ Ibid 113 .

⁹² Roger of Wendover, 258-259.

⁹³ Ibid, 260.

throne would cause open physical warfare between John and the pope. Innocent's success would probably mean a French king on the English throne. Instead of having two kingdoms to deal with, that he could play off against each other for his own gain, Innocent would have a single very powerful kingdom to face. This single country's continental border would also be very close to Innocent and the French king would have a minimum of restraint against physically attacking the papacy in case of serious trouble. If Innocent actually made this deposition happen, it would be the last time he could do this against so powerful a monarch. France would then be too strong to contest in any controversy that arose. Any other monarch who became crossways with the pope would immediately have France breathing down his throat.

The distinct possibility also existed that the papacy would have to become a vassal of France. France would be able to dictate policy to Innocent and interfere greatly in the affairs of the Church. This was a possibility that had to trouble Innocent very much. It would set the papacy back five hundred years to the time of Charlemagne when the papacy had to look toward the Frankish empire for approval and protection. What Innocent really wanted was a strong France, a strong England and a strong Holy Roman Empire. At the present time he had excommunicated two of these three monarchs. It was very unwise to try to wage war on two fronts at the same time. Innocent needed a

way out. He needed to have John remain on the throne of England unless another Englishman who had the backing of the nobility could be found. That possibility seemed unlikely.

John had handled the situation in the worst way that it was possible to have dealt with it. Instead of currying the favor of his nobles and clergy, he oppressed them and confiscated the lands and property of those who has opposed him and also their relatives. John never understood that in order to be a successful monarch you had to have a certain number of people whose loyalty is unquestionable. This was something that could not be accomplished overnight. It required a conscious effort and skillful statesmanship over a long period of time. John had every right to fight Innocent over the appointment of Langton, but if a class were to be given in how not to wage this kind of battle successfully, John would not even have to attend to receive the best mark. His personality was not one that made people love him. That is the reason he has been such an easy target through the centuries for those who dislike him. He did not bring glory or riches to his nobles, on the contrary he impoverished them, nor did he shower gifts onto his clergy, he taxed them and seized their lands⁹⁴. He was either in their

⁹⁴ Green, 233.

pocket or was making some demand of them, making them feel oppressed rather than appreciated.

Intellect, which John had in abundance, does not command loyalty. John needed loyalty from his subjects, all he had was mistrust and fear. With the French and the other allies of the pope rattling their swords and armor, and with nobles that he had to feel were less than trustworthy, John was isolated. He was looking for a way out as well. We had each of the two antagonists looking for a solution for very different reasons.

John prepared an army. Roger of Wendover say that it was sixty thousand strong.⁹⁵ He had requisitioned every ship on his coast and had brought in Knights from as far away as Ireland. Typical of John's war preparations, there was not enough food to feed the army and many soldiers had to be sent home. A large turnout was not due so much to the desire to keep John on the throne as it was to keep the French king out of England. The barons knew there was no other alternative to John at this point in time. There was not a noble that had emerged as a leader that could take John's place. If the French king were to be successful, most of the nobles would probably loose their

⁹⁵ Roger of Wendover, 263.

holdings and their status even though a great many of them had French ancestors. They were there to fight for their own interests and to protect England.

The military situation was not that desperate. John had forged an alliance with Otto against the papal sponsored forces, as Otto was also excommunicate. They had won several victories. He had previously conquered the Welsh and the Scots. He had recruited allies on the continent. Along with Otto, he had convinced the barons of Poitou to join in his cause against Philip. Militarily, things looked positive⁹⁶.

The chroniclers have different versions of what happened next. Roger of Wendover says that two of the brothers of the Temple arrived in England and approached John about meeting with Pandulph and discussing a settlement of the problem.⁹⁷ Matthew of Westminster says that Pandulph arrived more or less unannounced and warned John of the dangers facing him and offered him a way out if he swore allegiance to the pope.⁹⁸ The end result was that Pandulph came to England and met with John, warned him of the great danger facing him from the continent and presented him terms that would allow

⁹⁶ Green, 234.

⁹⁷ Roger of Wendover, 263.

him to keep his kingdom, prevent a disastrous war and resolve the excommunication.

Roger of Wendover gives several reasons for John's agreement:

. . . had been now for five years lying under excommunication, and had so offended God and the holy church, that he gave up all hopes of saving his soul; . . . he dreaded the arrival of the French king, who was waiting near the sea-coast with a countless army, and planning his downfall; . . . he feared, should he give battle to his approaching enemies, lest he should be abandoned to himself in the field by the nobles of England and his own people, or be given up to his enemies for destruction; . . . the day of our Lord's ascension was drawing near, when he feared that, . . . he should with his life lose the temporal as well as the eternal kingdom. Being therefore driven to despair by these and the like reasons he yielded to the persuasions of Pandulph, and, although not without pain, he granted the underwritten form of peace; he also swore by the holy gospels in the presence of Pandulph, that he would be obedient to the church's sentence, and sixteen of the most powerful nobles of the kingdom swore on the soul of the king himself, that, should he repent of his promise, they would, to the utmost of their power, compel him to fulfill it.⁹⁹

While John may have had a small concern about his soul, his main concern had to be over the loyalties of his nobles. Nothing in his past deeds or words would suggest that he had an overriding anxiety about his soul. For five years he had withstood every onslaught the pope had proffered against him. He had shown no fear, only anger, when

⁹⁸ Matthew of Westminster, 115.

⁹⁹ Roger of Wendover, 264-265.

each of the papal escalations of edicts against him was announced. He always reacted with his own increase of oppression and intimidation of his subjects to prevent them from even thinking about deserting his cause.

Now he was ready to capitulate. The episode with the Geoffrey of Norwich, a loyal subject in the past, who had decided to abandon him and whom John had put to death, had to upset him and create the concern that others may not be far behind in their thinking. Several of his nobles had already fled England rather than wait around for his capricious discipline to strike. This was a few months before he had received letters separately from the king of Scotland and the wife of the king of Wales¹⁰⁰. These letters had come to him about the same time from two different sources. Each letter warned him of treachery in the ranks of his nobles if he persisted in the war with the pope. His nobles had been absolved by the pope of any vows of fealty or homage to him. This had struck fear into his heart and undoubtedly was still on his mind even though he had collected hostages from the remaining loyal nobles. John knew that he had pushed this issue as far as he could.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 257-258.

The problem was in his feelings about his army. He could not rely on them. He needed another ally. Instead of fighting Innocent with his army and his nobles, he decided to fight his barons with Innocent. With Innocent on his side he could use that alliance to leverage against his subjects to make them fall into line. He had to surrender, the question was how could he do so to his best advantage? Innocent had provided him with the perfect opportunity.

John agreed to the pope's terms. Roger of Wendover quotes his letter to the pope:

I, John, by the grace of God, king of England and lord of Ireland, will, from this time as formerly, be faithful to God, St. Peter, the church of Rome, and to my liege lord pope Innocent and his catholic successors;. . . I will assist in holding and defending the inheritance of St. Peter, and particularly the kingdoms of England and Ireland, against all men, to the utmost of my power. So may God and the holy gospel help me, Amen.¹⁰¹

The deed was done. John had accomplished more with the stroke of a pen than he could have with all the armies of Europe. He surrendered to one non-combatant foe and stymied all of the others who posed actual physical threats rather than an abstract spiritual one. In reality, he had surrendered to the pope only the right to appoint religious offices. In the future the pope would certainly want to confer with his most prized vassal

¹⁰¹ Ibid 270.

before another controversial appointment was made. John had offered his homage¹⁰² to Innocent. Innocent in turn returned John's kingdom to him as a fief. With John's character, he was not going to let an oath stand between him and his desires, if it came down to that. To John it was only a word that would allow him to carry on business as usual, only perhaps with more vigor. The interdict which had lasted six years, fourteen weeks and two days was finally over¹⁰³. Innocent formally accepted John's oaths on November 4, 1213 after receiving his representatives¹⁰⁴.

John immediately started plans for the invasion of France. His fleet had found the French fleet at anchor and unguarded. They immediately set several hundred boats adrift towards England and destroyed many others after looting them¹⁰⁵. He met with Langton and the other formally exiled clergy and received absolution from his excommunication. He exhorted his nobles to accompany him to Portsmouth to embark for France. Many of his nobles refused, others demanded money as their funds were

¹⁰² F. L. Gansholf, *Feudalism*, (New York, 1961), 74. Gansholf defines homage as "the self surrender of one person to another".

¹⁰³ Matthew of Westminster, 119.

¹⁰⁴ C. R. and M. G. Cheney, 155-156.

¹⁰⁵ Roger of Wendover, 274.

exhausted. John had to abandon his war. He determined to punish the barons who had deserted him in his time of need. As he set out to do so with an army, Stephen Langton, who was now recognized by John as Archbishop of Canterbury appeared and told John that he must stop and allow the barons to come to John's court and explain their reasons. The archbishop then met with the barons and read them the Charter of Henry I, pledging to help them stand up for these rights. The barons agreed to stand with Langton for their rights at the first opportunity¹⁰⁶. This is the very thing John was afraid of when he opposed the election of Stephen. Even though he was now a vassal of the pope, and had given him homage, the pope's chief representative in England was fomenting insurrection against him.

However, the seeds of John's pledges were about to bear fruit. He had sent representatives to Rome to asking Innocent for a condemnation of the charter, Langton and the barons¹⁰⁷. It was not long in coming. It began on April 15, 1214¹⁰⁸ as Innocent sent John a letter forbidding anyone from excommunicating him or placing his chapel

¹⁰⁶ Roger of Wendover, 276-278.

¹⁰⁷ Green, 248.

¹⁰⁸ C. R. and M. G. Cheney, 159.

under interdict without explicit permission of the pope. Then on March 19, 1215¹⁰⁹ Innocent sent a letter to the magnates and barons of England. He invalidated the conspiracies and condemned any armed rebellion. He asked that they submit all grievances to the king peaceably. He also wrote Stephen Langton on the same day and ordered him to mediate the peace between the king and the barons. He also questioned whether the archbishop was favoring the nobles. At the same time Innocent wrote to John and asked him to hear the barons case and let it be decided by their peers in John's court on the basis of the customs of the land. Basically Innocent was telling John to do as he wishes.

On June 18, 1215¹¹⁰ Innocent ordered the barons to help the king against those who have not obeyed Innocent's prior mandate. On July 7 Innocent wrote to Peter, Bishop of Winchester, Simon, Abbot of Reading, and Pandulph, papal subdeacon. He expressed his "surprise and anger"¹¹¹ over the fact that while John had made his reparations to the Church and to Stephen Langton and the other bishops, the same bishops were not helping John against the rebelling barons. The pope said that these barons are worse

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 167.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 169.

than the Saracens¹¹². On August 24, 1215¹¹³ Innocent wrote two letters canceling the Magna Carta on the grounds that the barons forced the king to sign it under threat of violence. He forbade the king or the barons to obey the charter and chastised the barons for ignoring the fealty they owe the king. He ordered the barons to send representatives to the pope at the time of the General Council, at which time the pope would issue a new agreement which would eliminate abuses against them and be more fair to the king.

Then on November 4, 1215¹¹⁴, Pope Innocent confirmed the suspension of Stephen Archbishop of Canterbury by the Bishop of Winchester and Pandulph, papal subdeacon. On December 16, 1215, the pope confirmed the excommunication of all the barons and the accomplices who had attacked King John. In December¹¹⁵, Innocent wrote three letters to King Philip of France, one to his son Louis, Odo, Duke of Burgundy, various bishops of England and France, Guérin, bishop of Senlis, Robert, Archbishop of Rouen,

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid, 169-170.

¹¹³ Ibid, 170.

¹¹⁴ Ibid 172.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 173-174.

to the prelates of the realm of France, the barons of England, to the bishops of Cambrai, Liège, and Utrecht, and lastly to the clergy of London. All of these letters were urging these men not to give any aid or comfort to the barons who had opposed King John.

Innocent had taken his obligations to John very seriously. John had fulfilled the dream that Innocent had been carrying with him since before he took the papacy. J. R. Green has given the best description of Innocent's fantasy when he said "Innocent was dreaming of a vast Christian Empire with the Pope at its head to enforce justice and religion on his under-kings. . . ." ¹¹⁶. The operative word in that quote is "under-kings". Innocent desired to have all of the monarchs in Europe to submit to him exactly like John had. He wanted to be the great overlord who would orchestrate the moves and politics of all of Western Europe. He viewed all of the monarch as his inferiors. It did not matter to him who may have been on the throne of England or how they treated their people as long as that ruler paid homage and fealty to Innocent and allowed the Church to function as Innocent thought appropriate.

Actually Innocent was not too concerned about the treatment of the church as he had

¹¹⁶ Green, 248.

given orders in his letters in October 1213¹¹⁷ that all of the clergy were to remain faithful to John. This is the same man who had robbed them of their lands and belongings, murdered some, persecuted their families and essentially made their lives and the lives of their families miserable for the duration of the interdict. Sidney Painter said "Only baronial plots and the raised sword of Philip Augustus had brought him [John] to submission."¹¹⁸ Innocent's overriding concern was that his desires to be the great overlord were to be fulfilled. He also felt that once the precedent was established it would last forever. His thirteenth century mindset told him that fealty and homage lasted forever when it was between the Church and a monarch. He could envision a universal super church with responsibility not only for ecclesiastical duties but for the temporal as well. John was the first. Once he could consolidate this victory, he could move on to the next.

This is what Innocent had in mind from the beginning. His appointment of Stephen Langton was bound to bring a clash. He had to know that. His goal from the outset was to establish this control that he was so actively seeking. By placing Langton at the top of

¹¹⁷ C. R. and M. G. Cheney, 154.

¹¹⁸ Painter, 201.

the English Church, Innocent felt he could slowly erode the power of John over the clergy. Langton would have to consult with John and on most every appointment and would have a great deal of influence over who had power in England. The clergy were the administrators and the educated class. If this group of people could be controlled and their loyalties assured, then the cause Innocent was espousing in his heart of hearts would be eventually accomplished.

Langton was no doubt a party to all of this. He and Innocent had spent a lot of time together as young men and as learned colleagues. Conversations had to have taken place about the destiny of the Church, the direction it needed to be taken, the papal monarchy (although maybe not using that exact term), and the means of accomplishing the goals they defined. Innocent was aware of his familial connections and the distinct possibility that one day he would be pope. (Langton may have been more of a true churchman than Innocent. He seemed to have been sincerely interested in helping the oppressed barons and improving the quality of life in England, at least for the upper classes.)

In order to discuss the other major cases of interdicts and their effects upon England, it is necessary to return to an earlier time. As these interdicts overlapped the interdict over

Canterbury, it is difficult to discuss them in strictly chronological order.

John's brother, Geoffrey is constantly causing John problems. He again ran afoul of John in 1207. John had levied another tax over all of England. Geoffrey said he would not pay the tax and promptly left England.¹¹⁹ Geoffrey had forbidden all the clergy in York to pay the tax, and had excommunicated all the tax collectors. His archbishopric was raided and plundered by his enemies after his departure. Innocent immediately asked the bishops of Worcester, Ely and Hereford to intercede with John, get all of Geoffrey's holdings restored and get the king to repair any harm done to Geoffrey or his holdings, and if necessary to put an interdict on the county of York.¹²⁰

It was like spitting into the wind. Innocent had already put an interdict on all of England over the Canterbury election. So nothing happened. Then Innocent issued a bull in 1208 addressed to the bishops of London and Rochester directing them to do the same thing.¹²¹ This was to no avail as all of the bishops except the Bishop of Winchester had left England due to the Canterbury issue. Geoffrey died in Normandy in 1212.

¹¹⁹ Roger of Wendover, 236.

¹²⁰ Krehbiel, 90.

The interdict was not a very effective weapon, at least in England. It seems preposterous that Innocent did not understand that he had no weapons left to try and get any satisfaction from England over any issue. It is almost as if he had forgotten England was already under a general interdict over the Canterbury appointment. The only thing left to him was excommunication and it would not have been practical to excommunicate an entire population. Innocent was showing his arrogance when he expected everyone to dance to his tune. He does not seem to realize that the king has legitimate rights that must be respected also. Taxation is an issue that should not concern the Church unless the Church is being taxed solely or differently than anyone else.

There was one other instance of interdict that occurred during the time of the Canterbury affair. In 1209, a clerical student accidentally killed a woman while he was practicing archery. The student fled. The people of Oxford imprisoned his three roommates, who had no knowledge of the incident, in lieu of the perpetrator. Several days later King John ordered the three clerks hanged. An interdict was laid upon the city

¹²¹ Krehbiel, 91.

and most of the students and masters left the city to study elsewhere¹²². Since this was the livelihood of the city, the citizens responsible for the hanging begged for absolution from a papal legate sent by Innocent to resolve the affair. The legate exacted quite a price for peace. The responsible parties had to go to a different Church each day, nude, except for a scourge, and sing the fifteenth Psalm until all the Churches in Oxford had been attended. Then the townspeople were given some very strict rule on rents they could charge and of the treatment of the students.¹²³ Once again the papacy had overruled John and declared his punishment invalid. Had these men not been clerks, the papacy would not have gotten involved. The clerks were (wrongly) accused of a secular crime. Their punishment should have been left to the civil authorities. Innocent was more than willing to get involved in any secular proceeding if he could find the right excuse.

The reason that this worked was not due to some draconian fear the people of Oxford had over not being able to find salvation, but because without the students, the town would shrivel up and die. This boycott had been going on for four years and the town

¹²² Roger of Wendover, 250.

¹²³ Krehbiel, 146-147.

was in dire straits financially without the students and masters. Innocent was able to use an economic weapon, which, apparently, was much more effective than a spiritual one. Incredible as it may seem, no lesson appeared to be learned from this episode.

Another cause Innocent took up was that of collecting the dowry owed Richard's widow, Berengeria, by John. In March - April 1201, Innocent wrote 3 letters about the payment of this dowry. He wrote another in November 1201, three in 1204, two in 1208, Innocent threatened an interdict on her lands in 1209, and he ordered an interdict on her lands in 1210. In 1215 John agreed to a settlement with Berengeria. She complained to Innocent shortly thereafter that she has been despoiled of her lands.¹²⁴

Innocent attempted to be a collection agency a second time when he tried to force John to pay a legacy of money owed Otto, his nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor. Richard had granted Otto a legacy, which John was obligated to pay.¹²⁵ Roger de Hoveden says that John owed Otto the earldom of York and the earldom of Potiou and half of the

¹²⁴ C. R. and Mary G. Cheney, 36, 37, 58, 87, 95, 126, 130, 138, 143, 171, 174, 175.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 43.

treasures of Richard and all of the jewels of Richard.¹²⁶ John refused at that time to give anything saying he could not go against a treaty he had with France.

Innocent then began to write letters to John. He wrote three on March 1, 1201 on this subject, Innocent began to threaten in November 1201, cajoled John on March 28, 1202, threatened again on February 20, 1203, wrote another threatening letter on September 22, 1205, sent a number of letters to archbishops in England and to John himself on February 17, 1206 and finally in July 1208 he tried cajoling again¹²⁷. (Keep in mind at this point in time John is already under an interdict.)

Over the length his reign John gave considerable sums to Otto beginning in the first year of his reign and continuing almost to the end. John never claimed to have given what was supposedly owed, but he continually, if only in starts and stops, gave funds to his nephew.¹²⁸ In 1209 John gave a great sum of money to his nephew.¹²⁹ Very soon

¹²⁶ Roger de Hoveden, 481.

¹²⁷ C. R. and Mary G. Cheney, 44-45, 48, 58, 65, 76, 91, 107, 114-115, 132.

¹²⁸ Painter, 154.

¹²⁹ Roger of Wendover, 248.

after that Innocent excommunicated Otto in 1210.¹³⁰ It is not known if John was responding to the exhortations of Innocent or if he had his own reasons for this sponsorship. The probabilities are that John reopened negotiations with Otto in 1202 as a response to the war with France. Things were looking grim for John on the continent and he needed all the allies he could find. Having Otto on his side would give him two allies; Otto and Pope Innocent III.¹³¹ This relationship with Otto went from hot to cold depending on John's needs. John was first and foremost a self-centered political animal. Innocent also used Otto. After Otto's coronation by Innocent, Otto encouraged John to make peace with Innocent.¹³² It seems that two chess players were constantly trying to outmaneuver each other using the same chess pieces.

These two incidents demonstrate the position that Innocent wanted the Church to be in. He wanted to be the mediator of all significant disputes whether it crossed borders or not. Berengeria had only John's good will to depend on. If he did not want to pay the dowry owed to her there was not much she or anyone else could do about. For Innocent to be involved was foolish on his part beyond writing one letter to John asking him to

¹³⁰ Roger of Wendover, 251.

¹³¹ Cheney, 286.

consider the payment. This was not the business of the Church much less the pope.

While Berengeria was well connected, the benefit was much less to Innocent than the risk of alienating John. It is an example of the all-encompassing umbrella that Innocent wanted to extend over his spiritual domain. He felt he had the right to meddle in any affair whether it involved religious issues or not. Innocent's over eagerness to be involved in these frivolous problems diluted his ability to be effective when it counted. Whether Innocent was morally right or not is really of no importance.

These battles between John and Innocent were a chess match between two evenly matched opponents, at least in intellect. John really had no plan or desire other than to rule as an autocrat and leave things pretty much unchanged from the past. Unfortunately for John, he was up against a man with a vision, one who does not come along very often, but the most dangerous kind of opponent. John was able to manipulate that vision to suit his own needs most successfully. His incisive mind and shrewd logic enabled him to extract himself from a situation that would have done in a lesser man. John lost in that he had to give up his prerogative to chose the Archbishop

¹³² Cheney, 321.

of Canterbury. After John submitted to Innocent, there is not much of a question whether if the opportunity rose again to select an archbishop, if Innocent would have selected the next archbishop without the approval of John, his vassal. This submission to the pope, as it turns out, worked more to John's advantage than disadvantage. Innocent gained his dream, but at what cost?

Chapter V

Edward I and Boniface VIII

The thirteenth century saw a total of eighteen popes. There were only five popes after Innocent III who held the papacy for more than four and one-half years. They were Honorius III (July 18, 1216 to May 18, 1227), Gregory IX (March 19, 1227 to August 22, 1241), Innocent IV (June 25, 1243 to December 7, 1254), Alexander IV (December 12 1254 to May 25, 1261), and Boniface VIII (December 24, 1294 to October 11, 1303). Between the years 1261 and 1294 there were eleven popes not including Boniface VIII. During those intervening 33 years the papacy laid vacant for over seven of those years, a little more than twenty percent of the time. Until Boniface VIII no pope was in office more than four years four months.

Innocent III was in office for more than eighteen years, by far the longest time in office for any of the thirteenth century popes. Innocent III laid the foundations for the papal government and philosophy for the future. As the sophistication of the monarchies increased it was necessary for the papacy to also change. While some of this did take place, the relatively short pontificates in the later part of the century made it difficult to maintain continuity and to develop any comprehensive plan for the papacy. As we have

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seen, Innocent III established the papacy as an autocratic institution, with the popes setting policy and controlling the papal curia. This policy did not allow for the curia to set a consistent policy so the transition from one pope to another could basically carry on policy in the same way. When an autocracy is in power, any vacuum left by the death or removal of the autocrat will create a natural ceasing of the activities that require the sanction of the autocrat. Anytime there is a gap between autocrats, the government will tend to languish, as the supporting government does not want to go against the unknown wishes of the incoming autocrat. The papacy in the last half of the thirteenth century had many of these gaps.

The monarchies of Western Europe did not have this problem. While these monarchies were basically autocracies, as soon as one monarch died, the successor was crowned at the earliest opportunity. Since it was a non-elective office, the selection of this successor was a much easier task. The papal curia often had warring factions pushing different candidates. With the short pontificates it was difficult for one faction or another to build up its power and to stack the papal court with their own cardinals since these offices of the papal court were generally held for life.

Some other facts about the papacy of the thirteenth century are also very relevant at

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this point. Innocent III, Gregory IX, and Alexander IV (a nephew of Gregory IX) were from the Conti family. Celestine III and Nicholas III were from the Orsini family. Honorius III and Honorius IV were from the Savelli family. Boniface VIII was from the Caetani. There were four French popes; Urban IV, Clement IV, Martin IV, and Celestine V¹³³. There was one Portuguese pope, John XXI¹³⁴, there were no German or English popes.

Since the death of King John, England was blessed in the remainder of the thirteenth century with monarchs who had long reigns. King Henry ruled for fifty-six years and twenty days. He died November 16, 1272¹³⁵. His son Edward assumed the throne and England was to finish the thirteenth century and start the fourteenth under Edward. This gave Edward quite an advantage over the popes. Edward knew he was going to be king since his birth. He could plan, learn the methods, the techniques, and watch his father for many years before he became king. The popes, on the other hand, had none of these advantages. While some had sought the office, none could know they would

¹³³ R. W. Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages, (New York, 1970), 154.

¹³⁴ Kühner, 95.

¹³⁵ Matthew of Westminster, 454.

attain it until it became close to the time that they were elected. Most of these were old men as well; Edward was a relatively young man.

France was going through a similar experience. Louis IX ruled from 1226-1270 and his grandson, Philip IV, called the Fair ruled from 1285 - 1314. He inherited a country with an excellent government and administration. He, like Edward surrounded himself with astute advisors and expelled the clergy from participation in the law¹³⁶.

Edward had built up a series of laws in England after consulting with important men, the most notable of which was Robert Burnell¹³⁷, that eventually caused him to be known as the "English Justinian"¹³⁸. The first of these was the Hundred Rolls. These were followed with the series of statutes which began with Westminster I in 1275¹³⁹. He was

¹³⁶ A. C. Flick, "A New Challenge to Medieval Papalism" Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII, ed Charles T. Wood (New York, 1967), 16-17.

¹³⁷ Michael Prestwich, Edward I (Los Angeles, 1988), 560.

¹³⁸ Stuart C. Easton, The Western Heritage (New York, 1961), 257.

¹³⁹ Prestwich, 560.

able to improve the administration of the realm¹⁴⁰ and the finances of England which held until the disastrous war with France in 1294¹⁴¹. He was a very complex man. He had the temper that his ancestors, particularly King John, were noted for, but unlike King John, he was concerned for his subjects. On several occasions he is recorded as having expressed a desire to see that his poorer subjects were not cheated or oppressed. This contrast with the confrontational style he assumed with his nobles and clergy. He was less than generous with his nobility, using some heavy-handed tactics in order to get his way¹⁴².

Edward had taken the pledge to take up the cross twice, the second time being in 1287¹⁴³. The first time that he took up the cross, he was actually away fighting in the crusade when his father died. It took him two years to return home and be crowned. He landed in England on July 25, 1274 and had his coronation on August 19, 1274¹⁴⁴.

Tebaldo Visconti, who was to become Pope Gregory X, was serving with Edward on the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 561.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 562.

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Matthew of Westminster, 482.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 468.

crusade when Tebaldo received notice he had been elected pope¹⁴⁵. Edward's personal knowledge of this pope was to put him in the good graces of the papacy. Edward later had to retreat from the crusade in the east due to being deserted by friendly forces. He then went to Sicily and met with the now Pope Gregory X and asked him to discipline some of the nobles who had served with him¹⁴⁶. It was very unusual for an English monarch to actually have met a pope much less to be on a first name basis with a him. This pope was now the liege lord for the English king. Later, Pope Gregory, at the Council of Lyons, which met from May 1, 1274 to July 15, 1274, praised Edward to all present saying ". . . that the Holy Land would have been utterly lost if he [Edward] had not speedily gone to its assistance."¹⁴⁷ Edward, unlike King John, was in the very good graces of the papacy from the beginning of his reign up until the reign of Boniface VIII. He did not have to worry about interdicts, excommunications or other interference from Rome. The submission that King John had done set the stage for the close relationship with the papacy that was to follow with his son and grandson. While Edward had to put up with some papal interference up to the pontificate of Boniface VIII, he did not have to worry about day to day dictates coming from Rome. The papacy needed Edward. He

¹⁴⁵ Matthew of Westminster, 455.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

was one of their best servants.

After the papacy of Gregory X until Boniface VIII, the longest pontificate was just over four years. In those just over twenty years the papacy laid vacant for almost four of those years. There were two sedes vacans of over six months, one for nine months and one for twenty-five months¹⁴⁸. The papacy was in a state of disarray.

The secular face of Europe had changed drastically from the beginning of the thirteenth century. England and France, the two major powers in Europe, had established stable governments that were effective and ran well. The need of the educated clergy to be the administrators was diminishing as the monarchs began to realize that by using the clergy they were allowing the Church to take an unwelcome hand in government. The Church had a serious problem in its policy of succession, yet nobody in the Church realized it. Unless some men young enough to hold the papacy long enough to establish policy were elected or the succession policy were changed, the papacy was destined to continually go through cycles of this kind of malaise. The succession policy created

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 458.

¹⁴⁸ Kühner, 93-100.

more chaos than it did stability. As the century was drawing to a close, the tide was slowing turning away from the Church.

Just prior to the reign of Boniface VIII, the papacy had lain vacant for two years. The two powerful houses of Orsini and Colonna had split on their choice of a new pope. The other major factions were Charles II of Anjou, who was intent on the reconquest of Sicily, and the Franciscan spirituals who rejected the argument that the papacy was a secular form of government. Charles II was very influential in the choice of a pope. Pietro Angular da Murrone, who became Celestine V, was chosen. Celestine V was a hermit who was a very spiritual man. He had been at the head of a Benedictine congregation on Mount Majella near Aquila in the Abruzzi mountains on the borders of the Kingdom of Naples and the Pontifical State.¹⁴⁹

Matthew of Westminster describes the election:

a certain monk, named Peter de Muron, of the order of Saint Benedict, who had lived for a long time in the solitude of a hermitage, was, in the city of Aquilein, elected and created supreme pontiff, on the day of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 98-99.

the beheading of Saint John the Baptist, and assumed the name of pope Celestine the Fifth. He was a man of simplicity and uprightness, and one who feared God, and was distinguished for his virtues. On his way to the court, he did not presume to mount a horse or mule, but only a donkey; and when he had dismounted from that, and entered the church, a certain cripple cried out, and begged the people to put him on the ass on which the pope had been sitting, out of regard to charity. But the bystanders reproved him, and bade him hold his pence. But he cried out all the more, begging that, for the love of the Son of David, who had sanctified the folding doors, entering Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of an ass, they would put him on the ass's back. A marvelous thing happened. The cripple being placed on the ass, immediately received soundness in his limbs, and his legs and feet being strengthened, he who had been lame went forth, praising God for the merits of his servant, Celestine.¹⁵⁰

This was a time when miracles of any type were greeted with wonder. Celestine had produced a miracle by his very presence, which endeared him to the hearts of the common people and made him extremely popular among the populace.

Celestine was a true man of God who rejected worldly desires and did not seek to increase his power or the power of the Church. Unfortunately this made him a terrible pope. He was anything but an efficient administrator. He issued blank bulls, to be filled in later by those to whom they were issued. He appointed twelve more cardinals, eight of whom were French. He made many other appointments based upon very little

¹⁵⁰ Matthew of Westminster, 504.

information about the appointee. This made him very unpopular with the power brokers who were the movers and shakers behind the papal office. He was forced to resign after only five months in office "on account of the cares of worldly affairs which it brought upon him, he refused any longer to discharge the office of governor of the Romans, asserting that he was not fit for the execution of such laborious duties."¹⁵¹ Neither all of the cardinals nor the spiritualists universally recognize this resignation. Celestine wanted to retire to the mountains. Boniface was concerned that he may have to rebuild his power base and retake the papacy. There was some question as to whether it was legal for a pope to resign. To solve this problem, Boniface VII had Celestine arrested and put into the Fumons fortress. Celestine died in prison. Boniface was not the first choice for pope, by some accounts, but he was the last choice. Boniface spent quite a bit of his first year in office undoing the appointments and decrees of Celestine V¹⁵². Boniface revoked all the acts of Celestine except those, which he approved¹⁵³.

Celestine's pontificate showed how much the papacy had changed from its beginnings.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 507.

¹⁵² Southern, 154.

¹⁵³ Rt. Rev. Monsignor Horace K.Mann, The Lives of the Popes in the Middle Ages (London, 1932), 22.

A man of God had to have credentials other than those of piousness and devotion to the Church and its teachings. He also had to be a first class administrator. The Church and its responsibilities had become so vast that without the ability to understand organizational behavior, delegation and administration, it was impossible to carry on an effective papacy. It was also a requirement for the pope to be a man of God, someone who was in touch with the needs of the people and who could evenhandedly deal with the secular leaders. Celestine V and Boniface VIII were almost opposites. Celestine V had the Godliness, but not real world experience, Boniface VIII was a very worldly pope who understood money with very little Godliness.

Boniface VIII has been described as "one of the most sinister and violent figures ever to ascend the Papal Throne. He had distinguished himself in several difficult missions, and was, like almost all his immediate predecessors a notable lawyer . . ." ¹⁵⁴ His personality has been described as haughty and violent. ¹⁵⁵ He took office on Christmas Eve, 1294 and reigned for the next nine years. His was the papacy which set the stage for the downfall of the medieval papacy. He wanted to increase the power of the papacy in the

¹⁵⁴ Kühner, 99-100.

¹⁵⁵ Boase, T. S. R., Boniface VIII (London, 1933), 19.

same way that Innocent III had increased it, but he lacked the sense of selflessness that was one of the most important traits of Innocent. While Innocent was constantly trying to increase his power to enhance the position of the office of the papacy and the Church in European affairs, Boniface was trying to promote himself and increase his own personal power.

The tragic story of Celestine V illustrates the character of Boniface VIII as well as any. He was a ruthless man who would stop at nothing to achieve his goals. He had been laying the foundations of his power base since he was a cardinal. This power base was the House of Castani, which still exists today as the Dukes of Castani-Sermoneta and Teano.¹⁵⁶ Two of the cardinals who opposed Boniface were eventually deposed and excommunicated. The town that they were from was razed by Boniface and a new one built in its place. The property of the cardinals was confiscated and taken by Boniface for his own use and that of another family with whom Boniface wished to curry favor.¹⁵⁷

Boniface was continually trying to increase the finances and power of the papacy.

¹⁵⁶ Kühner, 100.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 100.

Clement IV, in 1265, had issued the decree of *Licet*¹⁵⁸ which reserved for the papacy the appointment of all offices and churches if the officeholder died while visiting the Apostolic See.¹⁵⁹ Boniface reinstated this decree extending the distance to two days journey from the curia. This had two effects. First, on the benefices within two days distance, it made them subject to the pope in all cases. Second, it gave that much more distance that the cleric had to travel before he was out of the pope's grasp, if he should happen to fall ill. Using a rough calculation based upon the figures given at the beginning of this thesis, two days travel would be at the most rapid forty-five plus miles. If Boniface had used this number, the older men who made up a lot of the bishops and benefice holders who came to visit the papal curia, would have taken three or more days to travel the forty-five miles. The result of this decree perpetuated the hold on benefices used as rewards for papal office holders, which made it easier for the pope to have a larger force of courtiers who had a vested interest in the pope remaining in office and being successful in his administration.

By the pope's providing for these offices and benefices, he was owed a substantial tax

¹⁵⁸ Boase, 101. He Cites the source for this decree as: Potthast, 19,326. Sext, Lib. III, tit. cap. 2. He does not have a complete bibliography due to space limitations.

or *servitia communia*. This was only one of the taxes or tributes paid to the Holy See by the holders of benefices. These costs often caused the offending party to go into debt to the point that a loan had to be taken out to pay for the first year's taxes. Boniface was constantly coercing candidates canonically elected into surrendering their rights and having them awarded back by the pope. This incurred the understandable consternation and concern of the affected parties.¹⁶⁰ The papacy was becoming an expert at extortion and Boniface was at the center of it.

The office holders of major ecclesiastical offices were required to journey to Rome on a regular basis to pay tribute to the pope. Most office holders wanted to avoid this task whenever possible. These men were usually from more northern climes and suffered in Rome during warm weather. The oppressive heat and humidity could break down the health of someone who was advanced in years or who suffered from allergies. Sanitation in Rome was not the best which increased the chances for illness and death even more.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 101.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 102.

Since most of the officeholders wanted to keep their benefice in the family, usually willing it to a blood relative - perhaps a "nephew" - they did not want to go to Rome. The trip to Rome could be a very arduous one for anyone, much less someone who was advanced in years as most clerics were, if they lived any distance from Rome. The roads were full of bandits. The clerics had to carry their expense money and any money that may be needed for bribes in the curia, if the cleric had done something to be forgiven. The sheer length of the journey and the physical demands it placed on the travelers were sometimes debilitating. Once they arrived, Boniface would begin trying to persuade them to relinquish their office to him so he could provide it back to them. Once this happened, the office then reverted to pope upon the death of the office holder. This robbed the families of the office holders what they considered their rightful inheritance. While benefices could not be inherited, there is no doubt that these often remained in the family, as has been shown, even the papacy was subject to this formula of inheritance. It is no wonder that the Great Schism and the Reformation were on the horizon.

As the end of the thirteenth century approached, England and France began a very costly war the result of which was financial hardship for both countries. As they were both short on funds the two monarchs did not want to let any funds leave their respective

countries to fund some cause other than to repay their own substantial debts. In 1296 Edward ordered all ecclesiastics to remit a fifth of their revenues under penalty of having their property stripped from them if they failed to cooperate. Edward then sent the sheriffs out to confiscate the property, which had not been given up. The king did his own appraising of this wealth, which further irritated the clergy and probably inflated a deflated estimate the clergy had placed on their own wealth. Edward also confiscated all the property of the archbishop. The clerics were afraid to travel on the road as they were afraid of the soldiers who may rob them of their belongings¹⁶¹. It was very reminiscent of King John's revenge against the clerics when the interdict was placed upon England.

Shortly after this in 1296, Boniface issued a bull (*Clericos laicos*, 1296) reaffirming the principle that secular rulers had no right to tax the clergy and he also stated that any monarch who did so would be automatically excommunicated. Edward's response was to withdraw the protection of English law from the clergy¹⁶². This gave rise to the problems the clergy were experiencing as described in Matthew of Westminster. This

¹⁶¹ Matthew of Westminster, 522.

¹⁶² Easton, 241.

made them fair game not only for the soldiers but also for any criminal that may be lurking on the road. As the clergy were one of the wealthiest classes in England, this must have thrilled the criminal element and terrified the clergy. The clergy did not waste much time in submitting¹⁶³.

The French had enacted similar, but more stringent legislation effectively preventing the papacy from getting any kinds of funds out of France¹⁶⁴. The effectiveness of the English and French embargoes are a testament to the kinds of organization that these two governments had undergone. Boniface relaxed his ban and let the state tax the clergy.

The French and English war continued and so did the mounting of the debts. The pope tried to act as a mediator but to no avail. Finally Philip of France forbade any cleric from going to Rome, which totally shut off any moneys or commerce between the curia and France. On November 18, 1302 one of the most famous and controversial bulls ever issued in the Catholic Church was issued by Boniface. This bull, *Unam Sanctum*,

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 242.

restates the philosophy so desperately promoted by Innocent III a hundred years earlier.

The Church is the superior to any temporal lord. All Secular rulers must submit to the pope or risk excommunication. The only true order comes from the temporal sword being under the control of the spiritual¹⁶⁵.

This papal bull is a reaffirmation of the world order that had been establish once by Innocent III when he forced King John to swear fealty and homage to him. The world in Western Europe was quite different in 1302 than it was in 1215. The two most powerful monarchs have much better control of their kingdoms. Neither has a populace that is about to overthrow them. The pope no longer has the power to bring additional external forces to bear against them. These two kingdoms are already at war. There is nobody the pope can go to and seek assistance.

Philip eventually had enough and was able to fabricate a justification to attack the pope based upon a number of questionable charges. The Italian enemies of the pope assisted Philip in his attack. It was to no matter; Boniface VIII was dead within a

¹⁶⁵ Boase, 319.

month¹⁶⁶. The danger of the Italian nobility forced the papacy to retreat to France and there it began what has become known as the Babylonian Captivity.

Edward played no small part in this drama. Without his tacit approval Philip could not have carried off the defeat of Boniface. Both men realized the danger of the policy that Boniface was trying to institute. Each had thwarted the efforts of the Church when they realized, due to the war expenditures, exactly how much wealth was controlled by the clerics in their own lands. Boniface's expenditures and his constant need of more wealth finally convinced them what had to be done. If Boniface could not be forced to retreat, then he must be overthrown. If they allowed the clerics to continue to increase their control in England and France, then the wealth and power of those monarchies were vitally threatened. It became more and more apparent that the monarchy had to have the upper hand in the dealings with the Church. The risk was that the power of the Church left unchecked was like a runaway cancer, eventually it would devour the secular government or the secular government would become so dependent on the Church that the monarch would become impotent in the governing of his own country. As long as the Church left well enough alone, Edward was satisfied to keep the relationship as it

¹⁶⁶ Easton, 242.

had been for one hundred years. Only when he sensed that the relationship was getting out of control, did he act.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Change is something that is constantly going on all around. Governments evolve and the successful ones must change in order to survive. In our own times, the whole of Eastern Europe collapsed because the leadership failed to recognize the changes going on around them and the necessity for adapting their own worlds to that change. The Church let Innocent III take it roaring into the thirteenth century. He introduced massive change that affected the world around him. The governments he dealt with adapted to his view of the world and then continued to build upon what they had learned. The papacy was content to remain an unchanging entity because it was happy with the status quo. It had leadership that did not look beyond their own desires for direction. Innocent III had many faults, but he was trying to develop an order that served God and took man to a higher plane.

A comparison of King John and his grandson brings into focus some startling similarities. Both men had terrible tempers. They were known for their tantrums and sudden outbursts that would terrorize their courtiers. Both men were very smart and very shrewd in their strategies in dealing with their opponents. Edward was raised by a

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very religious father, John was not. Both men wound up fighting the Church, Edward won, John lost.

The reasons for Edward's success and John's failure are not very complicated. The biggest was that Edward never had an opponent of the caliber of Innocent III. Innocent III was a true believer in his cause, a very dangerous man. He was driven to accomplish his goals and things just fell into place for him. There does not seem to be any real planning on Innocent's part, just a focused attempt that never lost its purpose or sight of its goal. Innocent was an opportunist who was often able to recognize when to hold out an olive branch or when to hold out a switch, particularly in the case of John. Some of his accomplishments were due also to luck, but luck is opportunity coupled with good planning.

Innocent was quick to issue interdicts and to excommunicate his enemies. He was ready to have England under three different interdicts at once and even then he was badgering John about paying an old age pension for John's brother's widow at the same time. That is a man who does not know when to stop. Innocent was so impressed with his status and mission in life that he felt he could make everybody do his bidding and that everybody should do his bidding no matter how bizarre or mundane the request. He

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issued excommunications and interdicts so frequently, it is doubtful that he really knew who all was affected. His good fortune was that his opposition, while formidable had a large chink in their armor. John could not trust his nobles.

With his own army, allies in France and his nephew Otto, John had the resources to defeat Innocent and possibly the French at the same time. There is no evidence that John ever thought about actually attacking the pope. As long as Philip was in the way, it would not be possible, but after defeating France, marching on to the papacy would have been an easy task. It would have been the solution to his problem. Apparently the office of the pope and the power of the Church intimidated even John, otherwise some sword rattling would have been in order. If Innocent III had actually felt physically threatened by John, he would have been thrown into a panic. Innocent III never dreamed of that kind of a challenge. Boniface VIII did not either, much to his dismay. Had he understood the frustrations of the monarchs, Boniface VIII would have pressed for negotiations. His greed and arrogance stopped him from comprehending what was happening.

Edward, unlike John, began early in his reign to improve the conditions and legal rights of his subjects. He worked very earnestly to accomplish this and this task put him in

good stead with his subjects. When he decided he needed to confront the Church officials and the clergy in general, he never had to fear that his subjects would not back him. Edward was much loved by his subjects, John was feared and not very well liked.

This was something John had never or would never dream of doing. There is not a hint anywhere that he thought of anyone or anything except himself and his power. The nobles were loyal because they had something at stake. At the first opportunity to do something about John, the nobles jumped at it. It only took the sixteen years of John's reign for them to either get fed up enough and/or to get up the courage to deal with John effectively. Their reward was to get excommunicated because John had outsmarted them. If the nobles had rebelled prior to John making peace with Innocent III, Innocent III would have sided with the rebels and driven John from office.

By the death of Boniface VIII, in 1303, the papacy had become as much a political office as a religious one. Duty to God and Jesus had been subverted to duty one's political allies and vengeance on one's political enemies, of which there were always many. Instead of essays on God's glory and the teachings of the Savior, the papacy issued bulls on taxation of the clergy, tried to build a case against secular interference in the collection of these taxes and attempted to bully the monarchs who disagreed with these

edicts. (Of course, this amounted to everybody at one time or another.)

Eric Hoffer described the history maker; "History is made by men who have the restlessness, impressionability, credulity, capacity for make-believe, ruthlessness and self-righteousness of children. It is made by men who set their hearts on toys. All leaders strive to turn their followers into children."¹⁶⁷. Innocent III would have been appalled to see himself described in such terms, yet his imagination was what propelled him into the monumental struggle that was to consume his life. He gave us ideas, traditions, and attitudes that have lasted to this day. His game of cat and mouse with John cost the Church its future, but he came so close.

¹⁶⁷ Eric Hoffer, The Temper of Our Time, (New York, 1969), 2.

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