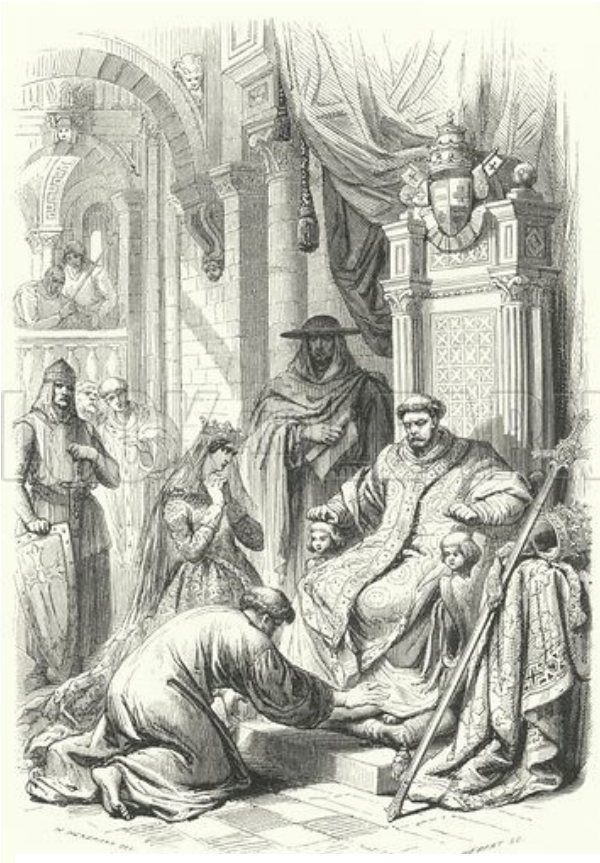


52. SAD TIMES

In chapter 45, we told you about the struggle between the Church and the State. You may remember that during the severe winter of 1076 - 1077, Henry IV, the powerful emperor of Germany, travelled to the little Italian city of Canossa to ask forgiveness from Pope Gregory VII. The pope let him stand in the freezing cold for three days at the gate of the castle. But finally, the pope had to grant the emperor forgiveness. He had no choice because a priest may not refuse when a penitent humbly asks for forgiveness.



Henry IV asking forgiveness from pope Gregory VII
lookandlearn.com

But later, the furious emperor took vengeance for the deep humiliation which he had suffered. He had crossed the Alps with a powerful army, and Pope Gregory had to flee for his life. It seemed as if the emperor was victorious because the

previously powerful pope died in exile. Henry IV then appointed the next pope.

But after the death of Gregory, that power struggle was carried on by his successors.

We will not go into details. Just remember that the 'investiture struggle'¹ continued undiminished.

The popes were not only *ecclesiastical* rulers with enormous power in the Church; oh no, over time, they became *civil* rulers as well. They governed entire provinces.

However, this did not satisfy those greedy and power-hungry popes. They did not think it was enough that they already ruled over all the inhabitants of almost all the countries of Europe in the ecclesiastical sphere. Nor were they satisfied with governing vast regions of land as civil rulers. No, they wanted to acquire even more power! All emperors, kings, dukes, and counts had to become their servants! That was their objective!

CONTINUAL POWER STRUGGLES

In the ecclesiastical domain, the popes were the most powerful. All the clergy, at all levels, were subject to them and had to obey their commands. But they also wanted to be the most powerful in the political domain. The popes said: "The whole world belongs to God."

Sure, that is perfectly true! All power in heaven and on earth belongs to God, the Almighty Creator heaven and earth, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He rules over all the world. All mankind is subject to Him. The king and the beggar alike, young, and old, must obey their divine Creator. All true, but the popes did not mean it that way!

The Roman Catholic church taught that the popes were the vicars of Christ on earth. That's why they said:

power was invested (included) in their ecclesiastical authority.

¹ Investiture here means that the popes believed they were entitled to political power as well because this

"Because the pope is the vicar of Christ on earth; emperors, kings and all earthly civil rulers are subject to us. The whole world belongs to us!"

But that was *not* true! We have mentioned it before and repeat it with emphasis: The popes are *not* the representatives of Christ. That is a figment of their imagination! The Lord *Jesus* rules and governs His Church on earth from where He sits at the right hand of His Father in heaven, and *He* watches over and cares for His people! He does not need the popes for that!

The ancient covenant people of Israel had a *theocracy*, which means that *God* was their king. He governed the people and gave them His laws and statutes. He delivered them when through their own fault, they got themselves into a mess. He humbled and destroyed their enemies.

Well, the popes wanted that too. The popes said they aimed at a theocracy too, but... they wanted to *exercise* that theocracy *themselves*! Were they not the vicars of Christ? Well then the whole world belonged to *them*! They wanted to rule over the German emperors, over the French and English kings.



*The pope crowns Charlemagne as emperor.
Britannica*

The pride and arrogance of the popes knew no bounds.

For instance, it once happened that the pope quarrelled with an English king. This king refused to obey the pope's command. The angry pope threatened him with punishment, but the English king laughed at the pope and went his own way. So the pope took his kingdom away from him and deposed him! His subjects no longer needed to

obey him. Only when the king humbly asked for forgiveness and promised to obey the pope's commands did he receive his kingdom back and was permitted to reign as king again! But he received his land back again as a feudal estate! That meant that he became the servant of the pope. The English king resented that!

The German emperors and French kings also strenuously resisted the unparalleled, bizarre power grab of the various popes. They absolutely refused to be ordered around by the pope. At times this resulted in bloody, cruel civil wars. The popes' ambition for power was so great they didn't shrink back from *anything* in a bid to force everyone to do their will. It was terrible!

If a civil ruler did not subject himself to the pope, the pope would pronounce the anathema on that ruler.

That anathema was a terrible weapon.

We discussed that in chapter 45.

In that chapter, the German emperor, Henry IV, was excommunicated. The influence of the popes on the ordinary people was so great that they would no longer listen to their emperor. They believed they no longer had to obey an excommunicated emperor because that was what the pope had declared! So, compelled by necessity, the German emperor travelled to Canossa, where the pope was staying.

The pope used the anathema against German, French and English emperors, but also counts and dukes.

If an entire nation refused to obey the pope, the pope pronounced the *interdict* upon that nation or a specific province or city. We shall hear more about that later. Just remember this well.

Whenever the pope placed the interdict on a country, province or city, the bells were not allowed to toll to call the people to church on Sundays. They were still permitted to have church services in those places but only behind closed doors. If anyone died in those areas, they were not allowed to give them a religious funeral. The minister was not allowed to speak at the

graveside. Silently the dead body had to be brought to the cemetery; silently, the people buried their loved one; silently, the mourners went home again! The only time that regulation did not apply was when a clergyman, a child younger than two years, or an unknown beggar died.

Couples were not allowed to get married if they lived in a region that was under the interdict. There were many more regulations, too many to mention. With all those heavy penalties, the popes tried to *compel* the disobedient people to obey them. At first, the popes usually got it their way. But in their lust for power, they abused the people with those penalties, and the bitterness and anger against the popes increased.

Keep in mind: The popes directed the anathema at one specific person, but the interdict affected the entire nation or a whole province or city.

We also know an ecclesiastical punishment, namely, Christian discipline or exclusion from the Christian Church. However, we only apply this when necessary, and we cannot do anything else. We may only excommunicate when a member dishonours God's name. We may *never* use it to destroy a person, but only to try to *save* them.

However, the popes employed the anathema and the interdict much too often and for their *own* glory and power. At times they even used it as a means of personal revenge! In brief, they *misused* church discipline. By doing that, they caused the effectiveness of those ecclesiastical punishments to decrease. The people no longer respected them.

It happened during those sad times that there was more than one pope at the same time. Of course, that was not possible even by *their* standards, for there can only be one vicar of Christ at a time! That's why each pope tried to push the other popes aside. They hurled the anathema (ban) at each other's heads. They cursed each other in the name of Jesus Christ. Isn't that terrible?

Because of such bad behaviour, the influence of the popes decreased. The peoples' respect for them disappeared. The people saw the embittered struggle between the popes and the emperors and kings. That was purely a power struggle. It had nothing to do with the welfare of the Church! That struggle was not healing but destructive.

MONASTIC LIFE GOES DOWNHILL

Apart from all that, the higher clergymen, the archbishops, and bishops, lived extremely sinful lives. And they were the spiritual leaders of the people! Disgusting things happened regularly.

Thousands and thousands of monasteries stretched across entire Europe. Tens of thousands of monks lived in them. These monasteries started because the monks wanted to flee from the sins and temptations of the world. They no longer wanted to live in the wicked world. And yes, to start with, the monasteries were a blessing for the nations and people they served. But they had degenerated over the years and eventually became places where those living there lived the most wicked and sinful lives.

In the beginning, those monasteries were poor, and the monks lived a simple, hardworking life on



Abandoned monastery in Italy. www.bcd.com

the borderline of poverty. Now, most of the monasteries had become wealthy

The monks lived in luxury and excess. Drunkenness and sexual immorality were the order of the day.

We easily understand that the people lost all respect for those so-called clergymen. When the clergy gave such a bad example, many of the ordinary people followed them. That was to be expected.

Things could not continue this way.

Was there no one who protested that wickedness?

Was there no one who tried to change that?

Were there no faithful people left?

Yes, there were, for there has always been a faithful remnant, and there always will be. And that faithful remnant did raise their voices against all those wicked, sinful things. We already told you about Bishop Claudius. He made many changes and preached against the false doctrines, but they would not listen to him. Others also did their best to put an end to those deplorable developments. Many people have tried to improve and reform the Roman Catholic Church, but they met with so much opposition and experienced so much hostility that they could not succeed.

In the next chapter, we will tell you about some of those people. This introductory chapter will help us understand what happens next and why those people acted the way they did.

During the Middle Ages, division, confusion, and strife reigned supreme. But God upheld and maintained His Church also through this dark period.

QUESTIONS

1. Define the following terms:

a) investiture struggle

b) ecclesiastical ruler

c) temporal ruler

d) theocracy

e) vicar

2. How did the popes abuse their authority when they claimed they had a right to require that emperors and kings be subject to them?

3. What was the anathema? When was it used?

4. What was the interdict? When was this used?

5. What is the purpose of Christian excommunication?

6. How did the popes misuse church discipline?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Is it possible to have a theocracy today? Why or why not?

2. Read the Form of Excommunication. Prove that its intention is the restoration of the person.

3. The Form specifies that one is to 'keep no company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but at all times admonish him as you would a brother.' What does this mean?