Pope Gregory VII vs. King Henry IV

The growing role of Church leaders in Europe’s politics caused many arguments over who was in charge. Kings wanted Church leaders to obey them, while the pope claimed he could crown kings.

In 1073 Gregory VII was elected pope. He wanted to stop nobles and kings from interfering in Church affairs. He issued a decree, or order, forbidding kings from appointing high-ranking Church officials.

The pope’s decree angered Henry IV, the Holy Roman emperor. For many years, the Holy Roman emperor had appointed bishops in Germany. Without them, Henry IV risked losing power to the nobles.

Henry refused to obey Gregory. He declared that Gregory was no longer pope. Gregory then stated that Henry was no longer emperor. He excommunicated Henry. This means to exclude a person from church membership. Catholics believed that if they were excommunicated, they could not go to heaven.

When the German nobles defended the pope, Henry backed down. He traveled to Italy and stood barefoot in the snow outside the pope’s castle asking to be forgiven. Gregory forgave Henry, but the German nobles still chose a new king. When Gregory accepted the new king as emperor, Henry went to war. He captured Rome and named a new pope. Gregory’s allies drove out Henry’s forces, but the dispute was not resolved.

In 1122 a new pope and the German king finally agreed that only the pope could choose bishops, but only the emperor could give them jobs in the government. This deal, called the Concordat of Worms, was signed in the city of Worms. A concordat is an agreement between the pope and the ruler of a country.

By the time Innocent III became pope in 1198, the Catholic Church was at the height of its power. Innocent was able to control kings. If a ruler did not obey, Innocent would excommunicate him or issue an interdict against the ruler’s people. An interdict forbids priests from providing Christian rituals to a group of people. The pope anticipated that by using an interdict, local people would pressure their ruler to obey.

1. Highlight in YELLOW all of the examples of the Pope’s power in the reading above.
2. Highlight in PINK all of the examples of the King’s power in the reading above.
3. In what ways did Gregory VII and Henry IV disagree?
4. Who had more power, the Pope or the King? Explain.
5. How does the struggle between Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV demonstrate how the Catholic Church was the center of daily life in Medieval Europe? In other words, if people were not Christian, would the pope be powerful, and would there be a struggle for power between the pope and the king? Explain.