

LESSON TWENTY-SEVEN



Church History

The Cluniac Revival, Hildebrand & the Investiture Controversy

The German Empire

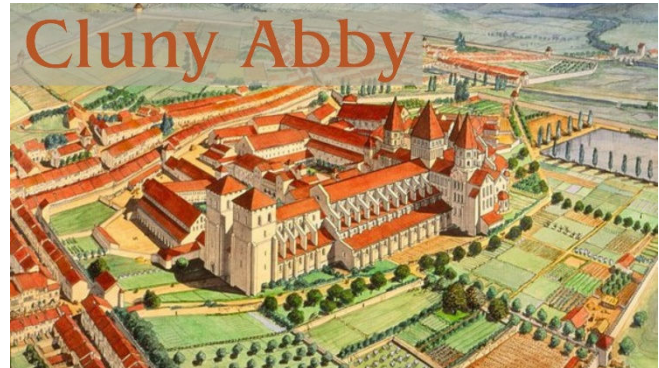
- After the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the Norse invasions, the revival of a strong Christian society in Western Europe sprang from a partnership between the monasteries, which had preserved the culture of the Carolingian Renaissance, and the Western monarchies. The most important of these monarchies was in Germany.
- By 900, Charlemagne's Empire in Germany had almost broken up into six tribal states – Saxony, Thuringia, Franconia, Lorraine, Swabia and Bavaria.
- However, the invading Magyar people from Asia forced a fresh unity on Germany. To protect themselves, the Germans banded together under a new king, Henry I (919-936).
- Henry's son, Otto the Great (936-973), revived the Carolingian ideal of the Holy Roman Empire, fighting successful wars against the Magyars, Norsemen, and Slavs, and making Germany into a great national power.
- Like Charlemagne, Otto also invaded Italy to rescue the lands of the papacy from Lombard aggression.
- As a reward, Pope John XII crowned Otto as Holy Roman Emperor in Rome in 962.
- One of Otto's most effective instruments in rebuilding the Holy Roman Empire was the German Church.
- Otto saw himself as the spiritual as well as the political head of the Empire – the sacred kingship ideal of Charlemagne – and he made great use of bishops in his government, setting them in positions of power as secular lords (counts, dukes and princes).

- This control of the clergy by the secular authorities was a widespread development all over Western Christendom.
- It was a consequence of a new social system whose seeds had been sown by the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West in the 5th century.
- With the disappearance of a strong central government, people had to look to a powerful local lord for protection against violence and injustice.
- Since the lord's power was based on the amount of land he owned, land became all-important in the new system.
- In the 8th century in France, Charles Martel drew these new social arrangements into the Frankish political structure.
- Keenly aware of the Spanish Muslim threat to his Frankish kingdom, Martel created a permanent class of armed warriors on horseback (knights) to keep the fearsome Muslim cavalry in check.
- Martel gave land to the knights as a royal grant.
- The greatest of the knights developed into a powerful military and landowning aristocracy. The least powerful of the knights ruled a small area organized around a manor house (a castle like dwelling); his land was worked by peasants, who were the lowest and poorest class in medieval society.
- Until very recently, this social system was called "feudalism" (from the Latin feudum, a grant of land from a superior to an inferior).
- The local landowner would build the local church on his own land at his own expense; so, the church's land and land-based property belonged to the clergy only as a gift from a local lord. Naturally enough, the lord saw it as his right to choose who would occupy the local church and its land as priest or bishop.
- When the king (who was a layman) appointed (invested) the man of his choosing as a bishop, this was called lay investiture. It took place through a ceremony in which the king bestowed on a bishop or abbot his ring and staff, symbols of spiritual office.



The Cluniac Revival

- In the partnership between monastery and monarchy which rebuilt Western Europe after the Norse invasions, one monastery in particular led the movement for establishing Christian values in society – the monastery of Cluny in south-eastern France.
- Founded in 909 by William the Pious, duke of Aquitaine, Cluny was led by a series of great abbots.
- Cluny's role in restoring the vigor and purity of the Western monasteries and in helping to shape a new Christian West, has been described as the Cluniac Revival.
- Abbot Odo was the real inspiration behind the Cluniac revival. He deliberately established daughter monasteries from Cluny.
- In 931, Pope John XI gave Cluny the right to control the other monasteries it had founded.
- The priors of the Cluniac monasteries were personally appointed by Odo, and took a vow of obedience to the abbot of Cluny. This organization of monasteries was called the Cluniac order.
- The main thrust of the Cluniac revival was to reform and purify existing monasteries, and establish new and better ones.
- Central to this Cluniac vision of reformed monastic life was the Cluniac liturgy.
- The Cluniac reformers were also committed to the Benedictine rule, the most widely used code for monastic life in the West.
- By the 10th century, most Western monasteries had become very ill-disciplined, ignoring the Benedictine rule in practice; by the 11th century, through the impact of the Cluniac revival, strict obedience to the Benedictine rule had become widespread throughout Western Europe.
- From its very foundation, Cluny enjoyed freedom from all secular and political control – unusual in this era.
- In 999, it also received from Pope Gregory V freedom from episcopal authority (control by bishops). Cluny was subject only to the pope.
- Despite Cluny's freedom from political control, there grew up a strong alliance between the Cluniac monks and secular rulers.
- Indeed, the Cluniac revival itself helped spread Christian ideals to the ruling classes, because part of the Cluniac policy was to take the sons of the aristocracy into Cluniac monasteries to give them solid Christian education.
- An especially powerful partnership grew up between Cluny and the kings of Western Christendom.



What did the kings get out of the Cluniac movement? Four things:

1. **Strong support for the ideal of “sacred kingship.”** The Cluniacs encouraged the view of kingship that Charlemagne had represented: the king was a spiritual figure whose power came directly from Christ; he was equal to the priest; he had a duty to regulate the affairs of the Church. Such an exalted view obviously strengthened the king’s position in society, surrounding monarchy with the heavenly sanctions of religion.
2. **A supply of well-trained civil servants.** Men trained in Cluniac monasteries (especially bishops) often became government officials, carrying out political, economic, and diplomatic functions.
3. **An army from the huge lands owned by the monasteries.** Those who lived on these lands were obliged to give military service to the king.
4. **Efficient monasteries where Cluniac monks honored God and prayed for society.**¹

The Cleansing of the Papacy

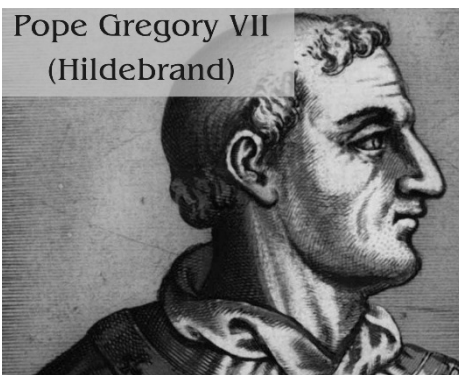
- While Otto the Great and his successors were rebuilding the Holy Roman Empire, the papacy was in a state of almost hopeless moral and spiritual degradation.
- It had become a political pawn in the hands of the Roman aristocracy, who fought over who should “own” the papacy.
- Things reached a crisis point in 1044. There was a violent rebellion in Rome against Pope Benedict IX (1032-1045), a scandalously immoral man. Another pope, Sylvester III, briefly ascended the papal throne in 1045, but Benedict’s political allies then managed to put Benedict back in power.
- Benedict, however, tired of being pope, sold the papacy to a third candidate, Gregory VI – but Benedict later changed his mind and reclaimed the papacy.
- When the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry III, arrived in Rome in 1046 so that he could be officially crowned by the pope, he found three rival popes!
- Henry III was the most striking product of the Cluniac revival. He was the perfect Cluniac king: holy and pure in his personal life, just and wise as a ruler and a dedicated Christian reformer of Church and society.
- Henry called a synod at Sutri, a small town just north of Rome; the synod deposed all three popes. Henry himself then placed a good German bishop on the papal throne – Pope Clement II. This act of Henry is known as the cleansing of the papacy.
- The most important of these reformers were:
- **Humbert of Moyenmoutier**, a scholar who in 1050 became bishop of Silva Candida, one of Rome’s suburban churches. Usually known as Cardinal Humbert.
- Humbert’s place in Church history is assured, as he was the one who excommunicated Patriarch Cerularius of Constantinople in 1054, thus creating the permanent schism between Eastern and Western Christianity.

- **Peter Damiani**, a Camaldolese monk and from 1057, bishop of Ostia on the Italian coast, another of Rome's suburban churches.
- Peter was famous for his personal sanctity and outspoken criticisms of immorality among the clergy.
- He was the man chiefly responsible for making popular the practice of self-flagellation (whipping or scourging oneself).
- Peter shaped flagellation into an orderly system. The flagellant would scourge himself with a leather thong on his bare back while chanting the Psalms; Peter defended the practice against criticisms, arguing that it was a voluntary imitation of the sufferings of Jesus.
- This practice became very popular in the West, especially among monks and particularly in the 13th and 14th centuries.
- Humbert and Peter Damiani were important, but the man who came to dominate the reform movement which the "cleansing of the papacy" had initiated was a native of Tuscany (north-west Italy), a former chaplain of Pope Gregory VI, called **Hildebrand**. The reform movement takes its name from him: the Hildebrandine reform.

Hildebrand & the Investiture Controversy

- The cleansing of the papacy by Henry III at the synod of Sutri created a series of reforming popes. Leo IX was the most effective. He travelled about Western Europe, promoting reform with unbounded boldness and energy and introduced committed reformers into the papal court as his chief advisors, including Humbert, Peter Damiani and Hildebrand.
- The reformers had two main aims:
- **The reformation of the papacy itself.** The Hildebrandine reformers wanted to make the papal court in Rome into a truly Christian institution which practiced the highest moral standards: a spiritual example to the rest of the church.
- For the Hildebrandine reformers, the pope was an infallible successor of the apostle Peter, standing in Peter's place, sanctified by Peter's merits, almost a reincarnation of Peter (when Hildebrand became pope, he said, "I am Peter's vicar; he now lives in my body"), and exercising absolute apostolic authority over all other bishops and churches – and indeed secular governments – throughout the entire world.
- **The purification of the Western Church from "simony" and sexual immorality among the clergy.**
- "Simony" means buying or selling positions of authority in the church. This was a common abuse; kings often sold bishoprics and Pope Benedict IX had sold the papacy itself to Pope Gregory VI.
- As for sexual immorality among the clergy, for the Hildebrandine reformers this did not just mean clergymen living with concubines or committing adultery and fornication; it also meant clergymen getting married.

- The reformers insisted on the celibacy of the clergy. This was partly a desire to take the high ascetic ideals of the monastery into the Church at large: a priest, like a monk, should be married to Christ, free of the worldly distractions of marriage and family, totally devoted to the kingdom of God.
- It was also partly a desire to stop clergymen having sons who would then inherit their father's priesthood or bishopric like a piece of property, without regard to the spiritual fitness of the son.
- The Hildebrandine reform movement made slow and hard-fought progress in the Church.
- The reformers purified the papal court from abuses and took over the crucial positions of power. They secured a great victory in 1059 at the Lateran council in Rome.
- Here, the reformers succeeded in placing the election of the pope exclusively in the hands of the "cardinal" clergy of Rome. Those were the clergy who belonged to the immediate staff of the pope – seven bishops, 28 priests and 18 deacons.
- The cardinal bishops were in charge of Rome's suburban churches; to them the Lateran council now granted the power of choosing a new pope. They were to then present their candidate to the cardinal priests and deacons, who either confirmed or rejected their choice.
- This reform liberated the papacy from political control: neither the Roman aristocracy, nor the Holy Roman Emperor, were to have any more say in who became pope.
- To prevent any future emperors from trying to force their hand in the selection of a pope, the reformers made an alliance with the Normans of southern Italy, led by Robert Guiscard.
- In return for official papal recognition for the land he had conquered, Guiscard promised to use his Norman army to support lawful elections to the papacy.
- The Lateran council of 1059 also passed strict new laws about the celibacy of the clergy. This incidentally removed an ancient and painful thorn from the papacy's side by leading to the final triumph of the church of Rome over the church of Milan.
- In 1073, at the age of 50, Hildebrand himself was elected pope, and took the name



Pope Gregory VII
(Hildebrand)

Gregory VII. By the overwhelming popular choice of the entire people of Rome, it was his own turn to sit on the papal throne.

- He had an amazing ability to get his friends and allies to do what he wanted them to do. He also had a supreme talent for dividing opinion about himself into violent extremes of adoration and hatred.

- Hildebrand saw life in military terms as raging conflict between light and darkness.

- The chief agents of darkness were the secular rulers – dukes, counts, princes and kings. They were nothing but glorified thugs, murderers dressed up in robes and crowns, children of Cain and Satan who oppressed the poor and fill the earth with injustice.
- To bring about justice, the agents of light – the Church, headed by the papacy – must take control of these evil rulers and force them to serve the cause of God.
- Only in this way could the righteous establish a truly Christian society. Hildebrand had a deep, heartfelt sympathy for the poor, and saw himself as their special protector against the oppression of the powerful.
- It was around this time that Western Christianity began to speak of Christians on earth as the “Church Militant,” contrasted with those now in heaven as the “Church Triumphant.” Previously it had been the custom to think of Christians on earth as the “Pilgrim Church” and those in heaven as the “Church at rest.”
- This change from pilgrim to warrior image reflects the new world-conquering aggression and self-confidence which the Hildebrandine reform movement brought to the Church.

Soon after becoming pope, Hildebrand published in 1075 a statement known as the *dictatus papae* (papal decree) which outlined his view of the papacy. Here are some of its claims:

- 1. The Roman Church was founded by God alone.**
 - 2. Only the Roman pope is rightly called universal.**
 - 3. The pope alone can depose and reinstate bishops.**
 - 4. The pope is the only one whose feet all princes must kiss.**
 - 5. The pope may depose emperors**
 - 6. No council may be called ecumenical without the pope’s authority.**
 - 7. The pope may be judged by no one.**
 - 8. The Roman Church has never erred, and (as Scripture testifies) it shall never err, to all eternity.**
 - 9. The Roman pope, if properly ordained according to Church law, is sanctified by the merits of Saint Peter.**
 - 10. He who is not in conformity with the Roman Church should not be considered a Catholic.²**
- Not all of this was new in what it claimed; other popes, especially since the cleansing of the papacy in 1046, had said similar things.
 - But the whole tone of the papal decree was new – its grand, sweeping, universal, self-confident assertiveness.
 - As pope, Hildebrand was determined to destroy the political power that secular rulers exercised over Church affairs. The reformers had freed the papacy itself, but other problems remained. The point at which Hildebrand chose to strike was the practice of “lay investiture.” This was the practice of lay people like kings, dukes, etc. appointing their choice as bishop or abbot.

- Hildebrand believed that the appointment of bishops and abbots by secular rulers was an unholy violation of the Church's independence from state control.
- Hildebrand particularly objected to the ceremony in which a king bestowed on a bishop or abbot his ring and staff, the symbols of their spiritual office.
- This implied that bishops and abbots owed their spiritual authority to the king – which is what Western kings believed, holding as they did to the sacred kingship ideal.
- In 1075, Hildebrand decreed that the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, must cease from the practice of lay investiture.
- The battle between the “papalist” and “imperialist” vision of Western Christendom had begun.
- Hildebrand's foe, Emperor Henry IV (1065-1105), was one of the most naturally gifted rulers and soldiers ever to wear the crown of Holy Roman Emperor.
- Henry had been involved in a civil war with his own German nobles for many years; it was only in 1075, at the age of 25, that he managed to establish his own power over the whole of Germany.
- The German Church had strongly supported Henry in the civil war against the nobles. German bishops, inspired by the Cluniac ideal, wanted to see a powerful Christian monarchy created in Germany as the basis for a Christian society, and despite Henry's obvious faults the Church backed him as the best hope of strong, stable government.
- So, when Hildebrand issued his challenge to Henry, the German bishops at first supported the Emperor.
- Henry defied Hildebrand's demand to cease from investiture and appointed a new archbishop of Milan. When Hildebrand protested, Henry called a council at Worms (western-central Germany) in January 1076. Here most of the German bishops joined in condemning Hildebrand and rejected him as pope. Henry sent an official letter to Hildebrand from the council of Worms which shows what Henry thought of this new pope:

“To Hildebrand, not pope but a false monk. How dare you, who have won your power by deceit, flattery, bribery, and force, stretch forth your hand against the Lord's anointed, despising the command of the true pope, Saint Peter: 'Fear God, honor the king' (I Peter 2:17)? You do not fear God, and you dishonor me whom He had appointed. Condemned by the voice of all our bishops, leave the apostolic throne and let someone else sit there, someone who will preach the healthy doctrine of Saint Peter and not exploit religion as a cloak for violence. I, Henry, king by the grace of God, with all my bishops, say to you – come down, come down from the papal throne, and be damned through all ages!”³

- Hildebrand's response to this threatening letter came like a bolt of lightning. He excommunicated Henry and released all Henry's subjects from their obligation of

- loyalty to him. Henry's closest allies, the German bishops, afraid for their own positions, obeyed Hildebrand and refused further cooperation with the Emperor.
- So, at one stroke, Henry lost two-thirds of his army which came from Church lands. Henry's German nobles seized this chance to rebel again and at a council in Tribur (just north of Worms) in October 1076 they suspended Henry from his imperial office.
 - With no effective army, Henry was powerless.
 - The Holy Roman Emperor, the most exalted king in Western Europe, had been toppled from his throne simply by the word of the pope.
 - Henry was desperate. With his family and a few loyal supporters, he journeyed down into Italy. He found Hildebrand at Canossa in the north, in a castle with Hugh the Great, the abbot of Cluny.
 - For three days in January 1077, Henry stood outside the castle gate with his wife and children, barefoot in the freezing snow, crying out to Hildebrand that he had repented, pleading for mercy.
 - Hugh the Great of Cluny interceded with Hildebrand on Henry's behalf. Hugh was as opposed to lay investiture as Hildebrand was, but he was also a gentler, more moderate person who wanted to see friendly cooperation between Church and state.
 - Henry's action had placed Hildebrand in a difficult position. As a priest, it was his duty to accept Henry's repentance and restore him to Church membership. Yet if Hildebrand did this, Henry would regain all his power in Germany – and then probably use it to destroy Hildebrand.
 - So, for three days Hildebrand hesitated, as Henry outside the castle and Hugh inside begged him to show pity. Finally, Hildebrand's priestly conscience gave way. He allowed Henry into the castle.
 - Weeping, the young Emperor promised to obey the pope's demands to cease from the practice of lay investiture. Hildebrand received him back into the Church.
 - From one point of view, it was the ultimate scene of the Church triumphing over the state: The Holy Roman Emperor, the supreme ruler of the Western world, lay prostrate at the feet of the pope, crying for mercy. However, Hildebrand must surely have guessed that the Emperor's tears of repentance were also the ultimate act of kingly hypocrisy and insincerity.
 - Hildebrand's forgiveness restored Henry's power in Germany, because it gave him back his army from Church lands.
 - When Henry returned to Germany, a new civil war broke out. Henry's foes elected Rudolf of Swabia as Emperor. The German bishops supported Henry against the rebellious nobles.
 - Both Henry and Rudolf looked to Hildebrand for support; for three years Hildebrand wavered between them as the war raged on.
 - At last, in March 1080, provoked by a heavy-handed demand from Henry that Hildebrand must excommunicate Rudolf, the pope came down on Rudolf's side and excommunicated Henry again.

- This time, however, the German bishops stayed loyal to Henry; they did not recognize Rudolf's claim to the throne and saw Henry as the only hope for peace and stability in Germany.
- Henry called a council at Brixon (northern Italy) in June which deposed Hildebrand from the papacy, and appointed archbishop Guibert of Ravenna in his place.
- In October, Henry won the civil war when Rudolf was killed in battle. The victorious Emperor invaded Italy in 1081, conquered the north and finally in 1084 captured Rome itself.
- Hildebrand locked himself away in the Roman castle of Sant' Angelo. Henry placed the archbishop of Ravenna on the papal as Pope Clement III; Clement then crowned Henry as Holy Roman Emperor.
- Robert Guiscard and his Normans rescued Hildebrand from Sant' Angelo, but they wrecked Rome in the process, committing appalling outrages. Hildebrand went with his dubious Norman allies into exile, to Salerno in southern Italy and died there in 1085.
- It looked as if Henry IV had won. But the struggle for the independence of the Church did not die with Hildebrand. For some time there continued to be two rival popes, one in Rome chosen by Henry, the other in exile chosen by the reformers loyal to Hildebrand's ideals.
- However, the great reforming pope, Urban II (1088-1099), a fervent disciple of Hildebrand, soon won most of Western Europe to his cause by sheer moral force of character, brilliant diplomacy, and his masterminding of the 1st Crusade. The Emperor's rival pope lost control of Rome in 1096.
- The struggle over lay investiture between Hildebrandine reformers and the secular rulers continued under Pope Urban II and his successor Pope Paschal II. Paschal was so committed to the spiritual independence of the Church from state control that in 1110 he offered an astonishing proposal to the new Emperor, Henry V (1106-1125).
- If the Emperor would give up all pretense of investing bishops with their spiritual authority, Paschal would surrender all the Church's secular possessions in the Holy Roman Empire to the Emperor; bishops would live in simple apostolic poverty.
- The proposal was not to the liking of most German bishops and Paschal had to withdraw it. At Worms in Western Germany that year, Pope Calixtus II and Emperor Henry V agreed on two points:
 1. **The Emperor would invest a bishop or abbot with his authority over the land that went with his office.**
 2. **The bishop's spiritual superior (his archbishop) would invest him with his spiritual authority over the Church - the Emperor would no longer confer the ring and staff.**⁴
- This agreement had already taken effect in France in 1106 and in England in 1107; it meant that a new bishop had to be acceptable both to the state and to the Church. The treaty between Henry V and Pope Calixtus in 1122, establishing the same policy for the Holy Roman Empire, was called the "Concordat of Worms."

- Such a compromise between papalism and imperialism would have disappointed Hildebrand, but it secured for the Church a lot more independence than it had enjoyed before.

Communion Controversy

- The dispute between Radbertus and Ratramnus in the 9th century over the doctrine of the eucharist broke out afresh in the 11th century.
- This time, the two main antagonists were Berengar of Tours and Lanfranc of Canterbury. Berengar was head of the cathedral school in Tours (north-western France), and later archdeacon of Angers (west of Tours).
- A popular theological teacher, his study of the Bible and the early Church fathers led Berengar between 1040 and 1045 to reject the teaching of Radbertus (that Christ's flesh and blood are so totally present in communion that the bread and wine simply cease to exist).
- Berengar preferred Ratramnus's view, that the bread and wine physically remain bread and wine, and that Christ's body and blood are truly present in them, but in a spiritual manner, received by faith into the soul, not by the mouth into the body.
- This caused great controversy, because by the mid-11th century Radbertus's view had become widely accepted in the West.
- Berengar's chief opponent was Lanfranc, an Italian who in 1045 was elected prior of the monastery of Le Bec in Normandy and in 1070 became archbishop of Canterbury.
- Lanfranc defended Radbertus's doctrine and took it still further by maintaining that even unbelievers who take part in the eucharist eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood.
- Berengar had few supporters and was put on trial for heresy by a local French council in Tours in 1054, where Pope Leo IX presided.
- Berengar was saved from condemnation by none other than Hildebrand, who believed that both Berengar's and Lanfranc's views should be allowed in the Church.
- However, the majority of Catholic Churchmen did not share Hildebrand's tolerance. In 1059, at a council in Rome under the papacy of Nicholas II, Berengar was again tried and, this time, condemned.
- Led by the unsubtle and heavy-handed Cardinal Humbert, the council bullied Berengar into signing a very crude doctrinal statement which said that Christ's flesh is physically chewed by the teeth of those who receive communion.
- Ashamed of betraying his real beliefs, Berengar found his courage after returning to France, renounced the doctrinal statement he had signed in Rome and taught his own doctrine with renewed vigor.



- Lanfranc wrote against him in 1063; Berengar replied with *Concerning the Holy Supper, against Lanfranc*, his chief work on the subject.
- In 1079, Berengar's old protector Hildebrand (who was now pope) summoned him to Rome, apparently hoping to make him secure against his enemies.
- However, the council that met to settle the issue was so completely hostile to Berengar that it defied Hildebrand, and commanded Berengar to withdraw his heresy or be put to death.
- Hildebrand could no longer protect him without risking his own reputation. Berengar once again gave in and signed a doctrinal statement which taught Lanfranc's view of the eucharist.
- Hildebrand then threw the full strength of his papal authority around the humiliated Berengar, threatening to excommunicate anyone who henceforth accused him of heresy or harassed him in any way.
- Berengar bitterly regretted his lack of courage in signing the doctrinal statement, and spent the last nine years of his life in retirement on an island near Tours.
- The triumph of Lanfranc's doctrine of communion over Berengar's shows that by the mid-11th century the Western Church was committed to a belief that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper ceased to exist after the words of consecration, and were miraculously replaced by the very flesh and blood of Christ.

Civil Courts and Church Courts: The Martyrdom of Thomas Becket



Martyrdom of Thomas Becket

- The Hildebrandine concept of the Church's independence from the state included the belief that the clergy should not be subject to the authority of the civil or secular courts.
- Clergymen who committed crimes, according to the Hildebrandine reformers, should be tried only by Church courts.
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- This view of the Church's independence, when put into practice, could provoke explosive conflict between church and state, since it struck at the power of Western kings to punish their own subjects for criminal offenses.
- The most famous conflict took place in England. In the aftermath of the Norman conquest in 1066, King William the Conqueror, who supported many aspects of the Hildebrandine reform, introduced into English law the twofold system of civil courts and Church courts.
- William intended the Church courts to deal only with strictly religious cases, such as breaking an oath sworn in God's name.
- However, the English courts extended their power enormously throughout the following century.

- By the time Henry II became king, an English clergyman who committed murder would be tried by a Church court and merely fined for his offence, whereas a civil court would try a lay murderer and if it found him guilty, sentence him to death.
- The only way a civil court could punish a criminal clergyman was if a church court stripped him of his priesthood.
- King Henry II was determined to undo this state of affairs, and make the English clergy subject to the civil courts in all criminal cases.
- However, Henry's archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, fiercely opposed him, and defended the right of the clergy to be tried by Church courts alone.
- King Henry actually had many of the English clergy on his side in his struggle against Becket, but he utterly shipwrecked his cause in 1170 when he told some of his knights, in an outburst of rage, that he wished someone would get rid of that troublesome Becket for him.
- Four of his knights took their royal master at his word, went to Canterbury cathedral, and murdered Becket at the altar.
- Shockwaves of horror and outrage swept the whole of Catholic Europe.
- Pope Alexander III forced King Henry to do public penance and give up his campaign against the Church courts; Becket's tomb in Canterbury became one of the most popular sites of pilgrimage for devout Catholics from all over the Western world.

¹ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham, Nick pages 164-165

² 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham, Nick, pages 171-172

³ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham, Nick, pages 173-174

⁴ 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham, Nick, page 177