

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INVESTITURE CONTROVERSY IN
MEDIEVAL GERMANY

A Senior Thesis

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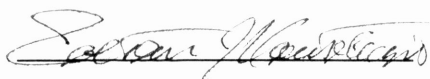
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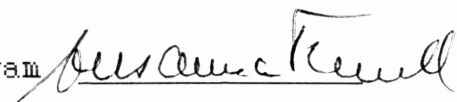
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Abstract

The Development of the Investiture Controversy in Medieval Germany. Rachel L. Green (Dr. Z. J. Kosztolnyik), History, Texas A & M University.

The focus of this paper is to research the relationship between the popes and emperors, beginning in 962 with the imperial coronation of Otto I by Pope John XII and ending in 1122 with the Concordat at Worms between Henry V and Pope Calixtus II. This research is a study of the events leading up to and including the Investiture Controversy. The Investiture Controversy is a power struggle between the popes and the emperors over who had what authority. Each claimed authority over the other. Through the study of primary and secondary sources in the paper, certain events and conflicts are discussed. The coronation of Otto I by Pope John XII in 962, mentioned above, the relationship between Otto III and Pope Sylvester II, the Synod at Sutri in 1046, the reforms of Pope Nicholas II and Pope Gregory VII, the conflict between Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII, and the Concordat at Worms in 1122 are analyzed and their significance considered. The result of the research is to demonstrate that the Investiture Controversy was the consequence of years of struggle between the German Emperors and the Papacy.

In the winter of 1077, one of the greatest leaders of Europe stood in the snow as a penitent outside of the castle of Canossa in northern Italy. The King of Germany, Henry IV, who held a large portion of Europe under his control, waited in the snow for three days to receive absolution from Pope Gregory VII.¹ The account above describes a scene that was not an isolated event unrelated to the course of history. It was just one battle in the war that raged between the German emperors and the popes in the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries. The result of the conflict was what came to be known as the Investiture Controversy. The stand-off at Canossa in 1077 was part of the Investiture Controversy between Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV. The controversy was neither the beginning nor the end of the struggle between the German emperors and the popes. This paper will discuss the relationship between these two entities beginning with the coronation of Otto I in 962² and ending with the Concordat at Worms in 1122.³ The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the Investiture Controversy was the result of years of strife between the popes and the German emperors.

In order to discuss the conflict between the emperors and popes, it is essential to understand the basis of their argument. The fundamental disagreement was based on how the popes and the emperors viewed themselves and how they viewed each other. In particular, what was important was how they perceived their own powers in relationship to those of the other. At the heart of the struggle was a debate over who had which powers and who conferred

which powers. It is necessary to discuss what areas the papacy believed were under its authority, what areas the emperors believed were under their authority, what areas the papacy believed to be under the control of the emperors, and what areas the emperors believed to be under the control of the papacy.⁴

The medieval Church taught that the pope was the vicar of Christ on Earth. As such, the pope was the spiritual leader of Christendom and also supreme authority in all spiritual matters. The pope could not be judged by anyone save God.⁵

As to how the papacy viewed itself in relationship to the emperors, the papacy believed that because it crowned the emperors, it had authority over the emperors and over their subjects and lands. The papacy believed that the emperors were created to protect it and its position.⁶ The papacy also believed that it had the right both to name and to depose secular leaders.⁷

The papacy believed that the emperors' authority was beneath its own. It also held very firmly that the emperors could not choose men to fill Church positions or invest a clergyman with any vestige of his office. The popes felt that this was an encroachment onto their own rights. They did not want to relinquish their control over the clergy of Europe. The bishops and archbishops of Europe should not recognize any, but the pope, as the one to whom they owed their positions.⁸

The concept that is of primary importance in understanding how the emperors perceived their authority and that of the papacy

is the idea of the proprietary church. Proprietary churches, or *Eigenkirchen* in German, was the system of churches in Medieval Germany based on the concept that whoever owns the lands on which a church, or any other structure, is built controls that structure.⁹ The lord of the land has the right to name and to depose the ecclesiastical leader of his property.¹⁰ This particular aspect of the proprietary church system known as lay investiture became an important part of the struggle between the emperors and the papacy that came to be known as the Investiture Controversy.¹¹ The qualifications and character of the man chosen to fill any leadership position are of utmost importance to the landlord.¹²

The reason that the idea of the proprietary church is significant to the discussion of the relationship between the German emperors and the papacy is that the emperors came to view the Church of Rome in the same manner as they viewed the churches in Germany. The emperors of Germany began to meddle with the elections of the popes in Rome because of the vested interest that they had in who held the Holy See. The emperors named and deposed popes, filling the office with men who supported their interests. Rome was the center of Medieval Europe, and the pope was the head of the Church. The emperors wanted to be able to exercise some control over the pope who influenced so many people due to his position as head of the Church.

Beginning with Otto I, the German emperors were given the

title of protector and defender of Rome. Due to this appellation, the emperors viewed it as their right to insure the worthiness of the men who held the position of pope. The emperors' interest in who filled the Holy See was also due in part to the fact that the pope crowned the emperor. The crowning of the Frankish, and later, German, emperors by the popes began in 800 when Charlemagne was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III in gratitude for the help that the king had given the pope.¹³ Otto I revived the imperial coronation in 926 when he was crowned by Pope John XII.¹⁴ The imperial coronation by the pope was necessary as it legitimized the emperor's claim to rule. The emperors needed popes who would support them and be receptive to their goals and desires.¹⁵ In the eyes of the emperors, the popes existed to support them and to give authenticity to their position as emperor.

These two differing views held by the empire and the papacy help to explain the conflicts between the German emperors and the popes beginning with Otto I and Pope John XII¹⁶ and ending with Henry V and Pope Calixtus II.¹⁷ The majority of the actions taken by each side during the conflict were motivated by these ideas.

In 936, Otto I was elected and crowned king of Germany. The German chronicler, Widukind, described the scene of Otto I's coronation. The archbishop of Mainz bestowed upon Otto I the symbols of his kingship: the sword, belt, cloak, armlets, sceptre, and staff. Afterwards, the archbishops of Mainz and of Cologne anointed Otto I and crowned him.¹⁸ The coronation and anointing

of Otto I by ecclesiastical leaders is important because it demonstrates his dependence on the church for validation of his claim to the throne. As discussed earlier, by reinstating the imperial coronation, Otto I was forging a link between his reign and the imperial reign of Charlemagne. He was seeking legitimacy through a connection with Charles the Great.¹⁹

The more significant coronation came in 962 when Otto I was crowned as emperor of Germany by Pope John XII. Due to some of the continuous fighting among factions in Italy, the land held by Pope John XII was in danger of being invaded by Margrave Berengar of Ivrea. Pope John XII called upon Otto I for assistance against Berengar. In exchange for his protection, Pope John XII offered to crown Otto I as emperor. In February, 962, Otto I was crowned by Pope John XII. The pope promised not to support Berengar against Otto I.²⁰ As part of the agreement, Otto I took an oath in which he promised to respect the pope's jurisdiction and to protect the pope.²¹ Otto I also confirmed Pope John XII's rights to the lands that the papacy held.²²

Pope John XII, however, did not keep his promise not to support Otto I's enemies and allowed Berengar and Adalbert to enter Rome. This angered Otto I. The first measure that Otto I took against Pope John XII in response to his actions was to enter Rome and to call a synod at St. Peter's at which he, as emperor, presided.²³ In Luidbrand's account of the proceedings, he tells of the charges that were brought against Pope John XII. The pope

was accused of such crimes as receiving payment for the naming of bishops, of adultery with several women including his father's concubine, Stephana, of turning the papal palace into a brothel into which virtuous women dared not enter, of maiming certain ecclesiastical leaders, and of not properly celebrating mass. As the pope would not come before the synod to answer the charges against him, he was deposed, and Pope Leo VIII was named in his place.²⁴

Although Pope Leo VIII is considered an anti-pope by the Catholic Church, it is significant that he was chosen by the synod. Otto I's interference into the affairs of the papacy in the issue with Pope John XII is meaningful as it illustrates the emperor's view of his authority over papal matters. Another crucial aspect of Leo VIII's election as pope is that Pope Leo VIII grants the emperor the right "of choosing the successor of the pope, and of ordaining the pope and the archbishops and bishops."²⁵ He also decreed that "no one ... shall have the authority to choose the patricius or to ordain the pope or any bishop without the consent of the emperor ... ; and the emperor shall be by right both king [of Italy] and patricius [of Rome]."²⁶

It is important that Otto I claimed the right to invest bishops and the pope. It confirmed his privilege to fill the ecclesiastical positions under his rule as he saw fit which was his prerogative under the proprietary church system. Otto I continued to use this privilege, as did his successors, throughout his life. In 965, Otto I named Pope John XIII and had him crown

his son, Otto II, on Christmas, 967. Months before his death in 973, Otto I named Pope Benedict VI to the Holy See.²⁷

As Otto II died not long after his father, the next emperor of interest to this study is Otto I's grandson, Otto III. By far the most fascinating aspect of the life of Otto III is his relationship with Gerbert of Aurillac who became Pope Sylvester II. As Gerbert was a man of great learning who was much ahead of his time, his influence over his pupil, Otto III, was tremendous. Otto III repaid Gerbert for his help over the years by naming him as pope in 999. Gerbert took the name Sylvester II in recognition of Pope Sylvester who, according to tradition, had baptized Emperor Constantine and who was the emperor's closest ally.²⁸

One of the areas in which Gerbert's influence over Otto III may be demonstrated is the idea of *renovatio imperii Romanorum* or renewal of the Roman Empire which prevailed in the actions of the emperor. The implementation of the idea can be traced back principally to 997, the year that Gerbert came to Otto III's court as tutor. With Otto III on the throne of the empire, and with Gerbert occupying the Holy See in Rome, both could work together to restore the Roman Empire to its former glory.²⁹ In the eyes of the emperor, restoring the Roman Empire included reviving the Christian Empire. To him, the two were inextricably intertwined.³⁰ The crowning of Charlemagne as emperor of the Romans had connected the *imperium christianum* with the *imperium Romanum* with Rome as the center of each.³¹ Otto III as head of

both empires held the roles of *rex* and *sacerdos*. He was both emperor of the *imperium Romanum* and "pope" of the *imperium christianum* in the tradition of Charlemagne.³² The pope in Rome was simply the chief bishop of the most important city in the empire.³³

In the Documents of Otto III (DO. III. No. 389), Otto III's view of his own authority in relationship to Pope Sylvester II is clearly revealed. In the document, Otto III recognizes that the Donation of Constantine, which supposedly gave property to St. Peter and thus to the papacy, was a forgery. As a result, Otto III grants eight counties in Italy to St. Peter through Pope Sylvester II. Otto III demonstrates his perception of his imperial powers when he states "we have elected Lord Sylvester our teacher as our Pope, and God willing we have ordained and created him most serene."³⁴

This document is the connection between Otto III and the proprietary church system. Pope Sylvester II is not the owner of the lands given to St. Peter by Otto III, but only the administrator. Otto III also obviously believed that he had the right to name who held the position of administrator over the lands when he declared in DO. III. 389 that he had created Pope Sylvester II as pope.³⁵

Pope Sylvester II was concerned about the conflicts that would arise between the German emperors and the popes due to the reviving of the empires. The pope did not share Otto III's view

of the proprietary church. In fact, on several occasions he wrote to abbesses, abbots, and bishops in Europe exempting them from the control of any authority, save the pope's.³⁶

In an important, but false, document, Pope Sylvester II conferred the royal title on Stephen of Hungary. The conferment of the royal title was without question a power held by the emperor. Only the emperor had the right to elevate someone to the rank of king. Yet, in this false document, the pope conferred the royal title. Future popes, such as Gregory VII,³⁷ would use this document as a precedent to confer titles as they pleased. In the document, Pope Sylvester II claimed the authority of God and of St. Peter to name Stephen as king of Hungary. He also granted King Stephen the authority to control and manage the churches in Hungary as representatives of the popes.³⁸

What further conflicts and agreements might have occurred between Pope Sylvester II and Otto III are unknown. Otto III died at the age of nineteen in 1002. Pope Sylvester did not long outlive his pupil. Gerbert died the following year in 1003.

Henry II and Conrad II, who succeeded Otto III, are not of particular interest to this study. The next emperor who interfered significantly with papal concerns was Henry III. He followed Otto I's precedent of naming and sitting in judgment over popes.

Henry III is very interesting in that he believed that he had received a sacred office when he was coronated which allowed him to invest worthy men with ecclesiastical offices. He believed

that he represented Christ on Earth, a title held by the pope in Rome. As such, he held his duties to govern the empire and the church very seriously.³⁹

In the early 1040s, there was a considerable problem developing in Rome concerning the young pope, Benedict IX. In 1032, through the control of one of the wealthy families in Italy, a boy had been named to the position of pope. In 1045, Benedict IX was run out of Rome by citizens who were disgusted both by his behavior and by the control the Tusculans had on the papacy. Pope Sylvester III was named as successor. Benedict IX returned to Rome and sold his right to be pope to a man who became Pope Gregory VI.⁴⁰ In 1046, Benedict IX returned to Rome and claimed his right to be pope. This created a problem as there were now three popes in Rome: Benedict IX at the Lateran palace, Sylvester III at the Vatican, and Gregory VI at St. Mary's.⁴¹

The people of Rome called upon the help of Henry III to resolve the papal crisis. In response, Henry III rode into Sutri and called a synod in 1046 at which he presided.⁴² The result of the synod at Sutri was that the three rival popes were deposed, and Clement II was elected. Gregory VI and Sylvester III humbly went to monasteries to do penance for their sins, but Benedict IX returned to Rome in 1047 and poisoned Clement II. Damasus II was then named to replace Clement II. In 1048, Damasus II suffered the same fate as his predecessor at the hands of Benedict IX. At this point the clergy of Rome had had enough of Benedict IX, and

according to some accounts, poisoned him. However it occurred, Benedict IX was no longer a problem to the popes in Rome. In 1049, Henry III named Leo IX as pope.⁴³

One of the popes who held the office during the reign of Henry III was Nicholas II. In 1059, he released several reforming decrees. Among the reforms are a ban on lay investiture and on the judging of clergy by laity.⁴⁴ Pope Nicholas II also reformed the manner in which the pope was chosen. He decreed that the election of the pope should consist of the following parts: the pope must be chosen by the seven cardinal bishops whose choice must be confirmed by the other cardinal clergy, the clergy and the people of Rome must consent to the choice, the election was to be reported to the emperor, and the pope elect was to be consecrated as pope and enthroned by the cardinal bishops.⁴⁵ This decree removed much of the power of the emperor to control the election of the pope. Pope Nicholas II also followed the precedent of Pope Sylvester II in the conferring of the title of duke upon Normans in Southern Italy and Sicily.⁴⁶

During the height of the problems with the papacy, there was a reform movement among monasteries known as the Cluniac movement. The reforms began in 909 with the founding of the abbey at Cluny in Burgundy. It was the desire of the founders of Cluny to protect the monastery from the interference both of secular and ecclesiastical leaders. As result, they founded Cluny as a free abbey under the protection of the pope. This meant that the monks

of Cluny were free to elect their own abbots and were free from feudal jurisdiction. Cluny quickly became a center of reform both in the monasteries and in the churches throughout Europe.⁴⁷

At the heart of Cluniac reform was the desire to free the church from secular interference. This meant reforms both in the behavior of the clergy and in the behavior of the secular lords. The monks of Cluny fought against married clergy, simony, and lay investiture. They also believed that the church was justified in reprimanding those secular leaders who interfered with church affairs. The Cluniac movement sought to end the proprietary church system and to bring those churches back under the control of the church.⁴⁸

There is some connection between the Cluniac movement and the reforms of Pope Gregory VII. Pope Gregory VII supported the Cluniacs and also fought against the evils of lay investiture, simony, and married priests.⁴⁹ There were differences of opinion between Pope Gregory VII and the monks of Cluny, however. The Cluniac movement not only fought against secular interference, but also for independence from the papacy. Their desire to remain independent from the pope is demonstrated during the Investiture Controversy as the Cluniac monks remained in contact with Henry IV even though he was at odds with the pope.⁵⁰

Pope Gregory VII fought diligently to reform the church under him.⁵¹ In 1074, Pope Gregory VII held a synod in which he condemned all who were guilty of simony.⁵² The same year, the

pope forbade any married clergyman from entering a church until they had repented and changed their ways. He stated further that, "whoever therefore asserts that he is a Christian but refuses to obey the apostolic see, is guilty of paganism."⁵³ He also wrote to Siegfried of Mainz entreating him to incorporate the German Council in the fight against simony and fornication.⁵⁴ In 1078, Pope Gregory VII decreed, "that no clergyman shall receive investiture of a bishopric, monastery, or church from the hand of the emperor, or the king, or any lay person, man or woman."⁵⁵ Anyone who had received his position through lay investiture was advised that his investiture was annulled and that he was subject to excommunication until he had repented.⁵⁶

One very important document which was supposed at one time to have been written by Pope Gregory VII is the *Dictatus Papae*. The *Dictatus Papae* was written about 1090 and contains a list of decrees which cover the papal rights and prerogatives with which Pope Gregory VII undoubtedly would have agreed. Among the many decrees is one that states the pope's exclusive power to depose and reinstate bishops. The pope is also the only one able to create new bishoprics or to make new monasteries. While the *Dictatus Papae* includes the pope's right to depose emperors, the pope, himself, cannot be judged by anyone. No general synod may be called without the approval of the pope. The pope's decrees cannot be annulled by anyone, but he can annul the decrees of anyone. The document declares the inerrancy of the Roman Church.

It also gives subjects the right to accuse their rulers and states the pope's right to absolve subjects of their allegiance to disobedient rulers.⁵⁷

All of the decrees state the pope's supreme authority over all Christians, including secular leaders. The reminder of his right to absolve subjects of their allegiance to their rulers was a warning to secular leaders, such as the emperor, to remain obedient to the pope so that the pope would not support an uprising of the people against their leader. Henry IV discovered the truth of this danger during his struggle with Pope Gregory VII when the pope supported the rebellion of the German people against the emperor and even helped to set up a rival king.⁵⁸ Before this incident, in 1074, Pope Gregory VII had affirmed his supreme authority over secular leaders by declaring in a letter to King Solomon of Hungary that the king's authority to rule came not from the emperor but from the pope.⁵⁹ Pope Gregory VII was secure in his claim to supreme authority due to the fact that he had reached the pinnacle of ecclesiastical supremacy without the sanction of Henry IV.⁶⁰ This element reappeared later when Henry IV refused to acknowledge Gregory VII as pope.⁶¹

The struggle between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV which came to be known as the Investiture Controversy began in 1073 when Henry IV used his imperial right, or so he believed, to fill the vacant ecclesiastical position at Milan.⁶² Pope Gregory VII was

not content with Henry IV's interference in the affairs of the church in Milan.⁶³ Henry IV wrote to the pope promising submission and asking forgiveness for his interference.⁶⁴ Pope Gregory VII forgave Henry IV and harbored no ill-will toward him.⁶⁵ Henry IV, however, did not end his interference in ecclesiastical matters. As a result, the pope sent a message to Henry IV to the effect that if the emperor did not cease interfering with church matters, and if he did not remove from his court those advisors who Pope Gregory VII had excommunicated for simony, the emperor would face similar excommunication.⁶⁶

In response to this message, Henry IV addressed a letter to Pope Gregory VII which began thus, "Henry, king not by usurpation, but by the holy ordination of God, to Hildebrand, not pope, but false monk."⁶⁷ Henry IV was upset by Pope Gregory VII's attack on his imperial authority, as he viewed it. Concerning his imperial authority, Henry IV wrote that, "you have even threatened to take it away, as if we had received it from you, and as if the empire and kingdom were in your disposal and not in the disposal of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to the government of the empire, but he never called you to the rule of the church."⁶⁸ Henry IV proceeded to call for Pope Gregory VII to give up his position as pope, accusing him of teaching false doctrine.⁶⁹ Henry IV's letter was accompanied by a similar one from the bishops of Germany who also called for the deposition of Pope

Gregory VII.⁷⁰

Pope Gregory VII responded by excommunicating Henry IV in 1076.⁷¹ Henry IV became concerned that his excommunication might strengthen those who were rebelling against him. At Oppenheim in 1076, Henry IV agreed to rescind the edict which deposed Pope Gregory VII and to submit to the pope's authority in all matters.⁷² The German bishops also wrote annulling their edict against Pope Gregory VII.⁷³ At Oppenheim, Henry IV had been deposed temporarily until the matter would be fully settled by the pope at a diet to be held in Germany in 1077. Fearing that if he waited until the pope came to Germany, he would be permanently deposed, Henry IV went to Canossa to beg forgiveness of the pope in the scene that was described at the beginning of this paper.⁷⁴ At Canossa, the pope was forced to absolve the emperor and to restore him to his throne. Henry IV had to promise to support the pope in return for his absolution.⁷⁵

Henry IV, however, still did not reform his ways concerning his interference with the investing of clergymen. In 1080, Pope Gregory VII again excommunicated Henry IV. This time the pope had overstepped his bounds. The people of Germany did not support the pope against Henry IV on this occasion. The second excommunication was too much for them. They were tired of the civil war that the first excommunication had begun.⁷⁶ As a response to the pope's interference, a synod was held at Brixen at

which Pope Gregory VII was declared deposed and his successor, Clement III, was named. Having defeated other claimants to the throne in the civil war and having deposed Pope Gregory VII and declared Clement III to be pope, Henry IV entered Rome triumphantly with his troops and his pope. Pope Gregory VII fled from Rome to the castle of St. Angelo. He died in exile.⁷⁷

On Easter Sunday, 1084, Pope Clement III crowned Henry IV with the imperial crown.⁷⁸ Henry IV's reign did not end peacefully, though. He continued to battle against rivals to the crown of Italy. Chiefly, the rivals were lead by Countess Matilda of Tuscany who even succeeded in turning Henry IV's son, Conrad, against him.⁷⁹ Henry IV's second son, Henry, became heir when Conrad defected. He in turn joined his father's enemies and took his father prisoner. As a result, in 1106, Henry IV abdicated and surrendered the imperial insignia to his son, Henry V.⁸⁰

The Investiture Controversy came to an end in 1122 with the Concordat at Worms. Henry V and Pope Calixtus II came to an agreement about investiture. The emperor retained the right to invest the bishops with their fiefs and secular authority. He lost the right, however, to invest the bishops with their spiritual office and authority. This right was reserved for the papacy.⁸¹

The result of the agreement was to create two investitures: one by the emperor with the sceptre as a symbol of the secular authority and the other by the pope with the pastoral staff and

ring as symbols of the spiritual authority.⁸² The final victory was not the emperor's. Through the struggle, he retained only half of his right to invest bishops. The papacy remained in control of investiture.

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Soli Deo Gloria