

# Papal Power: Popes vs. Kings

*Think Question* - Who is more powerful: a pope or a king? Consider that a pope has religious and political power throughout Europe but a king has strong local military and political power. Who would win out in the end in a head-to-head conflict?



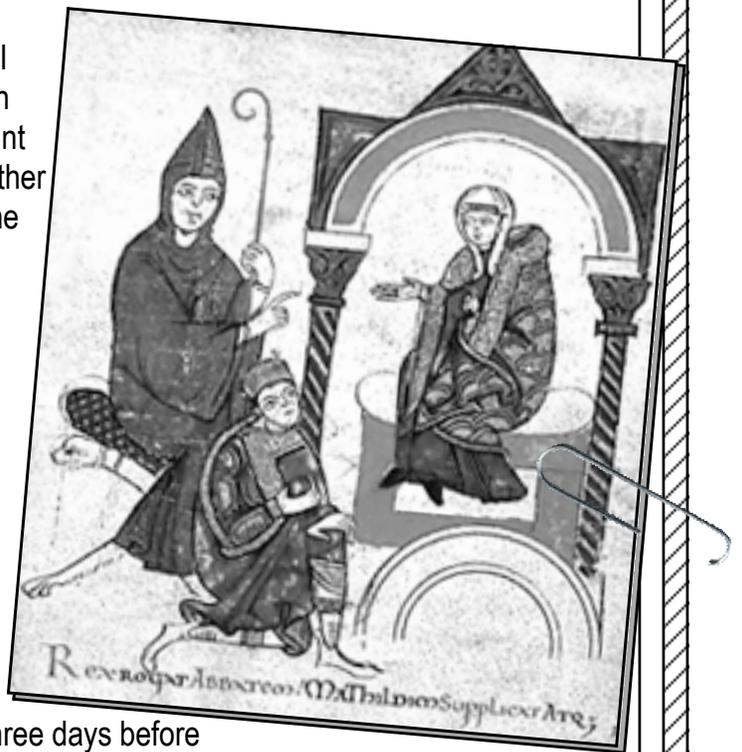
## Case Study Example

Conflicts between church and state occurred throughout the Middle Ages. One great clash between a pope and a king took place between Pope Gregory VII and Kings Henry IV of the Holy Roman Empire. Henry was very young when he became king. As early the age of fifteen, Henry moved to increase his power. Eventually Henry's actions brought him into conflict with Pope Gregory VII who was one of the great leaders of the medieval church.

Pope Gregory was both devout and clever. He worked to bring spiritual reform to the church by increasing the power and authority of the popes. Gregory believed that the **church was the supreme authority on earth**; he felt that rulers and ordinary people alike were all subject to the will of the church and its pope. He did not hesitate to use the terrible punishment of **excommunication** as a way to resolve conflicts of church and state.

The conflict between Henry IV and Gregory VII concerned the issue of who got to appoint local church officials. Henry believed that he had the right to appoint the bishops of the German church. Gregory, on the other hand, angrily opposed this idea because he wanted the power for himself. He responded to the emperor's attempts to name new bishops by excommunicating Henry. In addition, Gregory used an **interdict** to released the emperor's subjects from their feudal obligations of loyalty to their leader.

Fearing the rebellion of his vassals, Henry sought the Pope's mercy. During the harsh winter of 1077, Henry traveled to meet the pope. They met in a small town called Canossa in the mountains of northern Italy. Henry and his servants made a long and dangerous journey through the snowy mountains of northern Italy. Then when he arrived, the pope made the humiliated Henry wait in the bitter cold for three days before finally agreeing to see him. When they finally met, Henry pleaded for mercy. As a result, the pope revoked Henry's excommunication.



**Task:** Based on the case study you read on the front of this page, answer the following questions:

1. Who held the power - King Henry or Pope Gregory? What are some details that tell you?

2. *Think Question* - Why, in this case, is the Pope more powerful? What power does the pope hold?

3. *Think Question* - Is it always true that the pope is more powerful than kings? How might a monarch be more powerful than a pope?

### **Powers of the Church**

**Excommunication** - not allowing someone to be a member of the church. Because the Christian church was central to medieval life this was like removing them from society.

**Interdict** - Closing all the churches in a region and preventing priests from performing marriages, funerals or other services. An interdict is like excommunicating an entire region

**Inquisition** - This was an attempt to get rid of any beliefs that did not agree with the official teachings of the church. People had two choices: they could either reform or they would be turned over to the government for punishment or even execution.