

Papacy vs. Empire

During the 9th and 10th centuries, there was little conflict between Empire and Papacy because much of Europe was in a state of anarchy and neither Pope nor Emperor wielded much power. By the late 10th century, however, conversion of pagans, reforms in the Church, and the rise of strong Christian monarchs in Germany and France began to bear good fruit. Otto the Great was able to unite the German Barons and lent his support to a worthy Pope in Italy. And the Papacy, which had been degraded by corrupt nobles during the Dark ages, began to regain its spiritual authority, especially after the reforms of Gregory VII, began to take effect. These reforms prohibited simony, clerical marriage, and lay investiture, all measures which greatly improved the quality of the secular clergy.

Once papal influence was restored, conflicts between the Church and Christian monarchs were inevitable, and persisted throughout the Middle Ages. The Investiture Controversy, was only the first phase of this struggle, which lasted for hundreds of years and culminated in the Protestant Revolution.

The period of greatest conflict between the German Emperors and the Papacy began in the 12th century, and continued into the 14th century. The conflict between Empire and Papacy that raged during the High Middle Ages is known as the 'War of the Guelfs and Ghibellines', but unlike the Investiture controversy, which involved essential matters of Church governance, the conflict between Guelfs (supporters of the Pope), and Ghibellines (supporters of the Emperor), was almost entirely political. It began when Frederick Barbarossa, the first of the Hohenstaufen Emperors, attempted to assert Imperial control over northern Italy, and was resisted by the 'Lombard League', a coalition of Italian states supported by the Pope. The conflict involved many battles and had much to do with local politics, but was of little consequence outside Italy.

Unfortunately, the involvement of the Papacy in local politics diminished its moral authority and had serious consequences for Church unity. Soon after the Papacy freed itself from control of the German Emperors and Italian princes, it fell under the influence of France. From 1309 to 1376, the popes were compelled to move their administration from Rome to Avignon. And even when the Papacy was returned to its rightful seat in Rome, the German and French cardinals could not settle on a Pope and the resulting schism caused even more scandal to the Church.

The following chart shows the major periods of conflict and between the Papacy and secular Rulers in Western Europe.

Investiture Controversy 1050—1122	Church insist on its right to investment bishops in spite of opposition of Christian princes, and takes steps to reform the secular clergy
Guelf and Ghibellines 1120—1320	Conflict over control of Northern Italy between Hohenstaufen Emperors and independent Italian nobles allied with the Pope
Avignon Papacy 1309—1376	France helps Papacy resist Imperial control . . . by compelling Papal government and Curia to move to Avignon, a region under French influence.
Western Schism 1378—1417	Forty year Period during which a least two different men were simultaneously recognized as Pope by French, German, and Italian political factions.
Italian Wars 1417—1559	Renaissance Italy continued to be torn between French and Hapsburg influence.

Guelfs and Ghibellines — Civil War in Italy

The Guelf and Ghibelline conflict is best understood as a political conflict within Italy between land owning nobles allied with Imperial power (Ghibellines), and merchant cities allied with the Papal states (Guelfs). It led to several hundred years of civil war in Italy, but most conflicts were local and involved conspiracies and intrigue within city and regional government.

The reason the conflict was of consequence in Church history is because it politicized of the papacy and led to the **Avignon Papacy** and **Western Schism** of the 14th century. This was due to the fact that the Guelf, or Papal aligned faction, eventually turned to the French for support against the German aligned Ghibellines. This led to centuries of conflict over control of Italy, with various city states aligned with either French or Imperial interests. Civil Wars in Italy continued throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, but by then they were known as the 'Valois—Hapsburg' wars, and the distinction between Guelf and Ghibelline were no longer meaningful.

It is important to understand that the Guelf faction that supposedly supported the Pope was really concerned with the keeping the Papal states, or the temporal kingdom of the Pope, from falling under Imperial control for purely political reasons. The conflict had little to do with the spiritual authority of the Church, and Catholics aligned with the Imperial power considered themselves perfectly loyal to the teachings of the Church. The involvement of the Papal states in such an obviously political dispute between Catholic nations, however, diminished the moral authority of the Papacy.

The following terms refer to conflicts between Empire and Papacy during the High Middle Ages (11th through 14th centuries).

Guelfs	Political factions that opposed Imperial control of Northern Italy.
Ghibellines	Political factions that supported increased imperial influence in Northern Italy.
Lombard League	Coalition formed in 1167 to support the Pope and oppose German control of Italy.
Papal States	Region of central Italy ruled by the Pope as sovereign since 'Donation of Pepin' in 750 A.D.
Avignon	Coastal region west of the Alps, now part of France, but until the 19th century, considered part of the Papal States.
NOTABLE BATTLES: Guelfs vs. Ghibellines	
Siege of Weinsberg (1140)	Siege that ended when victorious Emperor resolved to allow the women withdraw in peace from the city, and they carried their husbands on their backs.
Battle of Leganon (1176)	Major victory of Lombard League over Frederick Barbarossa. Emperor made peace with Pope and withdrew from Italy.
Battle of Parma (1247)	Parma lost to the Guelfs. Decisive defeat for the Imperial forces of Frederick II.
Battle of Montaperti (1260)	Victory for Ghibelline Siena over Guelph Florence. Bloodiest battle of the Italian civil wars.
Sicilian Vespers (1282)	Notorious uprising by Ghibellines loyalists against the Frenchmen who ruled Sicily.

Popes and Emperors of the High Middle Ages

Dozens of Popes, Kings, and Emperors reigned during the High Middle Ages, but only a few of the most significant are listed below. Emperors and Popes highlighted in Red are of greatest importance.

POPES

St. Gregory VII 1073—1085 (12 yrs)	Responsible for 'Gregorian Reforms' that increased moral authority of the Papacy. Insisted on priestly celibacy, forbid simony, and insisted and Pope's right to 'invest' Bishops, — Known as Hildebrand before election to Papacy.
Bl. Urban II 1088—1099 (11 yrs)	Continued to press 'Gregorian Reforms' against Simony, Clerical marriage, and lay investiture. Called First Crusade. Supported Anselm against Norman kings of England.
Alexander III 1159—1181 (21 yrs)	Held Third Council of Lateran. United politically with Sicilian Normans to oppose Barbarossa's conquest of Italy.
Innocent III 1198—1216 (18 yrs)	Most Influential Pope of the 13th century. Initiated 4th Crusade in the East, Albigensian Crusade in France, and Spanish Crusade against Moors. Established Franciscans.
Gregory IX 1227—1241 (14 yrs)	Established Inquisition in France to deal with Albigensian heretics. Granted Papal Charter to University of Paris. Had long-running conflict with Frederick II.
Clement V 1305—1314 (9 yrs)	First Avignon pope, moved curia to France and dissolved Knights Templars under the influence of Philip IV.
Gregory XI 1370—1376 (7 yrs)	Last Avignon Pope, corresponded with Catherine of Siena.

HOLY ROMAN EMPERORS

St. Henry II 1014—1024 (10 yrs)	Known as St. Henry for his generous support of the Church and personal piety. Last of the Ottonian Emperors.
Henry IV 1056—1106 (22 yrs)	Known for his conflicts with Pope Gregory VII, and for his submission at Canossa. Investiture controversy eventually resolved between son Henry V and Pope Callixtus.
Frederick I Barbarossa 1155—1190 (35 yrs)	Founder of Hohenstaufen dynasty. Put down rebellions in Germany then brought Northern Italy under Imperial control. Long running Conflicts with Pope Alexander III. Finally defeated at Battle of Legnano, and perished in Third Crusade.
Frederick II 1220—1250 (30 yrs)	Vigorous Emperor who brought almost all of Italy and Germany under his control. Direct heir of both German and Norman—Sicily dynasties. Involved in many conflicts with Popes. Ex—communicated four times,
Louis IV 1314—1347 (33 yrs)	Holy Roman Emperor whose long—running conflict with the Papacy, led his nemesis Pope John XXII to move his court to Avignon.

KINGS OF FRANCE

St. Louis IX 1225—1270 (45 yrs)	Sainted King. Supported Church, ruled Justly, and led the 7th and 8th crusades.
Philip IV, the Fair 1285—1314 (29 yrs)	Autocratic king of France who expelled the Jews from France, Dissolved the Order of Knights Templars, Moved Papacy to Avignon

Holy Roman Imperial Dynasties

Another way to understand the Empire vs. Papacy rivalries of the Middle Ages are to view Emperors as representatives of powerful families of nobles. For most of the Middle Ages the head of one of the major dynasties of Central Europe was selected as Holy Roman Emperor. The policies of one family towards the Pope tended to be somewhat continuous over generations. The major Imperial dynasties of the Middle Ages, can be characterized as follows:

Ottonian (962—1014)

Dukes of Saxony

Otto I, Otto II, Henry II

Otto I (the Great) was really the first Holy Roman Emperor. He united Germany, pacified the Magyars, and greatly benefited the Church by conquering Northern Italy and wresting the Papacy from the hands of corrupt nobles. His descendants worked to strengthen the Church, but established the precedent of 'lay investiture'.

Salian (1027—1125)

Dukes of Franconia

Henry IV, Henry V

Long reigning Henry the IV was the most notorious and powerful of the Salian Emperors and was a key figure in the 'Investiture Controversy'.

Hohenstaufen (1155—1268)

Dukes of Swabia

Barbarossa, Frederick II

The Hohenstaufen's attempted to impose their rule on all of Italy. Their reign is most associated with the Guelf and Ghibelline controversy and the beginning of generations of Civil War within Italy.

Luxembourg (1312—1437)

Counts of Luxembourg

During the Imperial reign of the Bavarian Kings and Luxembourg Counts, the Papacy was largely under the influence of the French king rather than the Holy Roman Emperor.

Hapsburg (1440—1740)

Archdukes of Austria

Maximilian, Charles V

The Hapsburg dynasty rose to prominence by strategic marriages and alliances. Troops of Charles V sacked Rome in 1527 during 'Italian Wars' but, open conflict between HRE and Papacy reduced significantly after Protestant Reformation and Council of Trent. Hapsburg dynasty split into Austrian and Spanish lines in the 16th century.