

**The Snows of Canossa**

**Lead: When Cardinal Hildebrand became pope in the year 1073, he took the name Gregory VII. He was a stubborn man and probably more than the average pope enjoyed the role the church claimed for him as God's representative on earth.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts**

**Once he came to office he began to attack the practice of lay investiture. When a bishop took office he was invested or given the symbols of that office, usually a ring or staff, by the**

king or duke who controlled the area in which he would serve. Gregory wanted to stop that, he felt that only Churchmen should invest Churchmen with these symbols of office. In February 1075, the pope decreed that clerics who accepted investiture from laymen were to be thrown out of office and laymen who invested clerics were to be thrown out of the church.

Henry IV, the King of Germany, protested. He was not about to have the pope take away his right to appoint the bishops of Germany. A bitter exchange of letters followed. Gregory accused Henry of a lack of respect for the pope, Henry called Gregory a false monk.

**In 1076 the German bishops who had been invested by Henry withdrew their support for the pope. Gregory excommunicated them and suspended Henry from the kingship. German nobles were delighted. They didn't have to obey Henry now that he had been thrown out of the church. Thus Christmas of 1076, witnessed a strange situation. German clergy supporting the King, German nobles supporting the Pope.**

**Henry acted quickly and in January 1077 he came to Canossa, the pope's retreat in Northern Italy. Legend has it that he stood for three days in the snow seeking forgiveness which Gregory, as a priest, was required to give him.**

**Some historians have said that this marked the peak of the papal power in medieval Europe. The King had bowed before the pope. Others say Henry was very clever. By going through the motions of submission he got his Kingdom back. Whatever history's verdict it would be nearly two centuries before a European ruler would feel secure enough to challenge the power Rome.**

**"A Moment in Time" is produced at the University of Richmond. This is Dan Roberts.**

#### **Resources**

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