

The First Council of Lateran

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The troubling Great Schism, dividing the eastern and western church communities, is commonly set at 1054. In this same period, other troubling problems were appearing in the western community: flagrant immorality of many clergy; passage of church properties from clergy to their sons; widespread practice of simony (exchange of religious favors such as ordination for money); lay investiture (appointment of clergy, including bishops by lay authorities, especially emperors); lack of free elections of the papacy due to powerful families within the aristocracy of Rome vying to have their sons named pope. Relief from this last evil came from German Emperor Henry III when he appointed a series of four popes from Germany to wrest control away from the aristocracy in Rome. This still left the Emperor in control of papal appointments. With the death of Henry III, the reform from these evils continued slowly with subsequent popes but the major reformist was Pope Gregory VII. German Emperor Henry IV, fearing loss of control of the church, clashed with Gregory over the freedom of elections and this dispute continued for 50 years with succeeding popes until 1122 when Pope Callistus II reached a compromise with German Emperor Henry V at the Concordat of Worms when Henry granted free elections if they took place with himself or his representative being present at the elections.

Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome



Wax funeral effigy of Gregory VII located in Salerno, Italy



Cluny Abbey, Restored in 2004



This Benedictine Abbey, constructed in Cluny, France in 324, was mostly destroyed during the French Revolution. The reform movement started in this Abbey in the mid tenth century and its influence on the church continued through the twelfth century.

The First Council of Lateran, called by Pope Calistus to ratify the Concordat of Worms and to deal with other reforms, was held in this Basilica. This was the first general council where the language used was Latin instead of Greek.

In implementing reforms, Gregory VII used legal techniques and centralized power within the papacy. For this he was criticized by 20th century theologians Yves Conger and Hans Kung. However, these methods may have been necessary to achieve the reforms given the scope of the evils. Gregory was also criticized for continuing the mix of church and temporal powers such as illustrated at the left with the Pope's coronation of the King of Croatia after which the king expressed his loyalty to Gregory. This mix of papal and civil powers was likely not needed for the reforms.

Coronation of Croatia King



The First Council of Lateran brought reforms to the church:

- Papal Elections ➡ Ratified the Concordat of Worms allowing free elections.
- Simony ➡ Condemned the exchange of money for religious favors such as for ordinations or promotions.
- Lay Investiture ➡ Removed the right of the Emperor to appoint popes, bishops or priests. This essentially eliminated the 'divine right of kings'.
- Immorality of Clergy ➡ Condemned the immorality and removed all situations where immorality may be perceived. Declared celibacy mandatory.

Lateran I enacted 22 canons, all dealing with institutional reform. Some were related to the above reforms with more specific language. Others dealt with other more minor institutional reforms.