When Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor in 800, he unknowingly set the stage for future conflicts between popes and emperors. These clashes would go on for centuries.

The most effective ruler of medieval Germany was Otto I, known as Otto the Great. Otto, crowned king in 936, followed the policies of his hero, Charlemagne. Otto formed a close alliance with the Church. To limit the nobles’ strength, he sought help from the clergy. He built up his power base by gaining the support of the bishops and abbots, the heads of monasteries. He dominated the Church in Germany. He also used his power to defeat German princes. Following in Charlemagne’s footsteps, Otto also invaded Italy on the pope’s behalf. In 962, the pope rewarded Otto by crowning him emperor.

The German-Italian empire Otto created was first called the Roman Empire of the German Nation. It later became the Holy Roman Empire. It remained the strongest state in Europe until about 1100. However, Otto’s attempt to revive Charlemagne’s empire caused trouble for future German leaders. Popes and Italian nobles, too, resented German power over Italy.

The Church was not happy that kings, such as Otto, had control over clergy and their offices. It especially resented the practice of lay investiture, a ceremony in which kings and nobles appointed church officials. Whoever controlled lay investiture held the real power in naming bishops, who were very influential clergy that kings sought to control. Church reformers felt that kings should not have that power.

**VOCABULARY**

- cunning = trickery
- abhors = hates
- anointed = chosen
- plunder = robbery
- instigation = prompting, suggestion
- audacity = boldness, arrogance
- pupil = student
- master = teacher
In 1075, Pope Gregory VII banned lay investiture. The furious young German emperor, Henry IV, immediately called a meeting of the German bishops he had appointed. With their approval, the emperor ordered Gregory to step down from the papacy. In response, Gregory excommunicated Henry, banning him from the Church and condemning him to Hell. Afterward, German bishops and princes sided with the pope. To save his throne, Henry tried to win the pope’s forgiveness.

In January 1077, Henry crossed the snowy Alps to the Italian town of Canossa. He approached the castle where Gregory was a guest. Shoeless, and wearing the clothes of a peasant, Henry stood in the deep snow in front the castle and waited for an invitation to enter. For three days he stood there, shivering and eating nothing, before the castle’s huge gates were finally opened to him. Gregory later described the scene:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

“...having laid aside all the belongings (clothing) of royalty, wretchedly (miserably), with bare feet and clad in (wearing) wool, [Henry IV] continued for three days to stand before (in front of) the gate of the castle. Nor did he desist from (stop) imploring (begging) with many tears for the aid and consolation (relief) of the apostolic mercy (forgiveness) until he had moved all of those who were present there... to such pity and... compassion... Finally... we received him into the favor of communion and into the lap of the Holy Mother Church.”

Source: Letter by Pope Gregory VII

The Pope was obligated to forgive any sinner who begged so humbly. Still, Gregory kept Henry waiting in the snow for three days before ending his excommunication. Their meeting actually solved nothing. The pope had humiliated Henry, the proudest ruler in Europe. Yet, Henry felt triumphant and rushed home to punish rebellious nobles, although the struggle ultimately allowed German princes to regain power lost under Otto.

The successors of Gregory and Henry continued to fight over lay investiture until 1122. That year, representatives of the Church and the emperor met in the German city of Worms (vawrms). They reached a compromise known as the Concordat of Worms. By its terms, the Church alone could appoint a bishop and invest him with spiritual authority, but the emperor still had the power to grant him his fief, or land within the empire, investing him with secular political authority.

**Questions**

**Directions:** Read the article above, along with the documents, and as a group, answer the below questions on loose leaf.

1. Who was Otto I, and in what ways was he like Charlemagne?
2. What was lay investiture, and why did the Pope have a problem with it?
3. According to Emperor Henry IV, how do kings gain their power?
4. According to Pope Gregory VII, how do kings gain their power?
5. What “weapon” did the Pope use that forced Henry to give up his fight? Explain it.
6. Why would excommunication lose Henry his throne? How would one lead to the other?
7. How did Henry IV save his soul, and his throne? Why was this strategy guaranteed to work?
8. What were the terms of the agreement in the Concordat of Worms?
9. SUMMARY: Answer the Quaestio as a group!