

## ***Medieval Sourcebook: Gregory VII: Dictatus Papae 1075***

*The Dictatus Papae--"Those Things Dictated by the Pope"-- was included in Pope Gregory VII's register under the year 1075 as part of his letter collection. What they are precisely is a matter of debate. Some believe that they are the title headings for a book of canon law that was never written. What seems certain, though, is that the Dictatus Papae represent Gregory VII's and his supporters' view of the power of the papacy. As such, they reflect a profound change in world view. The claims recorded here would have been inconceivable in the year 1000. In 1075 they were still merely claims in a war to define authority within and the nature of the Catholic Church. A hundred years later, they were the agreed upon foundations for what had become a papal monarchy.*

### **The Dictates of the Pope**

1. That the Roman church was founded by God alone.
2. That the Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal.
3. That he alone can depose or reinstate bishops.
4. That, in a council his legate, even if a lower grade, is above all bishops, and can pass sentence of deposition against them.
5. That the pope may depose the absent.
6. That, among other things, we ought not to remain in the same house with those excommunicated by him.
7. That for him alone is it lawful, according to the needs of the time, to make new laws, to assemble together new congregations, to make an abbey of a canonry; and, on the other hand, to divide a rich bishopric and unite the poor ones.
8. That he alone may use the imperial insignia.
9. That of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet.
10. That his name alone shall be spoken in the churches.
11. That this is the only name in the world.
12. That it may be permitted to him to depose emperors.
13. That he may be permitted to transfer bishops if need be.
14. That he has power to ordain a clerk of any church he may wish.
15. That he who is ordained by him may preside over another church, but may not hold a subordinate position; and that such a one may not receive a higher grade from any bishop.
16. That no synod shall be called a general one without his order.
17. That no chapter and no book shall be considered canonical without his authority.
18. That a sentence passed by him may be retracted by no one; and that he himself, alone of all, may retract it.
19. That he himself may be judged by no one.
20. That no one shall dare to condemn one who appeals to the apostolic chair.
21. That to the latter should be referred the more important cases of every church.
22. That the Roman church has never erred; nor will it err to all eternity, the Scripture bearing witness.
23. That the Roman pontiff, if he have been canonically ordained, is undoubtedly made a saint by the merits of St. Peter; St. Ennodius, bishop of Pavia, bearing witness, and many holy fathers agreeing with him. As is contained in the decrees of St. Symmachus the pope.
24. That, by his command and consent, it may be lawful for subordinates to bring accusations.
25. That he may depose and reinstate bishops without assembling a synod.
26. That he who is not at peace with the Roman church shall not be considered catholic.
27. That he may absolve subjects from their fealty to wicked men.

translated in Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910), pp. 366-367

---

*This text is part of the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.*

## Gregory VII: Letter to Henry IV, December 1075

Ernest F. Henderson, *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*  
(Language modernized to a degree by Prof. Acevedo)

Bishop Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to King Henry, greeting and apostolic (holy) blessings: that is, if he be obedient to the apostolic authority of the Pope as befits a Christian king. Considering and carefully weighing with strict judgment the fact that we shall be accountable for the ministry entrusted to us by St. Peter, chief of the apostles, it is with hesitation that we have sent unto thee the apostolic blessing. For you are said knowingly to associate with those excommunicated by a judgment of the apostolic chair (Pope), and by sentence of a Church council. If this be true, you do know that you shall receive the favor neither of God nor of the Pope's blessing unless you separate yourself from those who have been excommunicated, and compelled to do penance—you must do first, with fitting repentance and satisfaction, seek absolution and indulgence for your sins. Therefore we counsel your Highness that, if you do feel that you are guilty in this matter, you should seek the advice of some Church bishop with speedy confession. Who, with our permission will offer you an appropriate penance for your errors, shall forgive you and shall truly write a letter to us, with your consent, explaining the extent of your repentance. legate

For it all seems strange enough to us that, although you send us many devoted letters; and although your Highness does show such humility through the words of your representatives-calling yourself the son of holy mother church and of ourselves, subject in the faith, one in love, foremost in devotion;-although, finally, you do commend yourself with all the devotion of sweetness and reverence: you do, however, at heart and in actions most stubborn, show yourself contrary to the canonical and papal decrees in those things which the religion of the church holds to be most important. For, not to mention other things, in the affair of Milan the actual outcome of the matter shows plainly how you carried out [your actions]. . . . And now, indeed, you inflict wound upon wound, contrary to the establishments of the apostolic chair [Pope], you have given the churches of Fermo and Spoleto—if indeed a church could be given or granted by a *man*-to certain persons not even known to us.

Since you do call yourself a son of the Church it would have befitting your royal dignity to look more respectfully upon the master of the church,-that is, St. Peter, [the first Pope] the chief of the apostles. . . . since we, however sinful and unworthy we are, do act as the representative of his power in his seat and apostolic service . . . .

## **The Letter of Henry IV to Gregory VII, January 24, 1076**

Henry, king not by usurpation [illegal takeover], but by the holy ordination of God, to Hildebrand, not pope, but false monk.

This is the greeting which you deserve, for you have never held any office in the Church without making it a source of confusion and a curse to Christian men instead of an honor and a blessing. To mention only the most obvious cases out of many, you have not only dared to interfere with the Lord's anointed, the archbishops, bishops, and priests; but you have scorned them and abused them as if they were ignorant servants not fit to know what their master was doing. This you have done to gain favor with the vulgar crowd [the masses]. You have declared that the bishops know nothing and that you know everything; but if you have such great wisdom you have used it not to build but to destroy. Therefore we believe that St. Gregory [an earlier Pope c. 600 CE], whose name you have presumed to take, had you in mind when he said: "The heart of the bishop is puffed up by having such an abundance of subjects, and he thinks himself more powerful than all others." [Pope St. Gregory the Great (r. 590-604), *The Pastoral Rule*]. We have endured all this because of our respect for the papal office, but you have mistaken our humility for fear, and have dared to make an attack upon the royal and imperial authority [actually, Henry had not yet been crowned emperor by the pope. He was only king of Germany and emperor-elect] which we have received from God. You have even threatened to take it away, as if we had received it from you, and as if the empire and kingdom were in your hands and not in the hands of God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has called us to rule the empire, but he never called you to the rule of the Church. This is the way you have gained advancement in the Church: through craftiness you have obtained wealth; through wealth you have obtained favor [from influential people]; through favor, the power of the sword [essentially by bribing knights]; and through the power of the sword, the papal seat, which is the seat of peace; [Henry claims that Gregory had usurped the papal throne. There had been a slight irregularity when Gregory was elected pope. The people of Rome enthusiastically acclaimed the popular Hildebrand as pope before the cardinals, the official electors, had voted. The cardinals then elected Hildebrand pope, and he assumed the name *Gregory VII*.] and then from the seat of peace you have expelled peace. For you have incited subjects to rebel against their prelates by teaching them to despise the bishops, their rightful rulers.

You have given to laymen [commoners] the authority over priests, whereby they condemn and depose those whom the bishops have put over them to teach them. [a reference to the fact that Gregory and other radical reformers within the papal party had called upon Europe's laity to reject sinful bishops and priests]. You have attacked me, who, unworthy as I am, have yet been anointed to rule among the anointed of God, and who, according to the teaching of the fathers, can be judged by no one save God alone, and can be deposed for no crime except straying from the faith. . . .

St. Peter himself said: "Fear God, honor the king" [In the Christian New Testament - 1 Pet. 2:17]. But you, who fear not God, have dishonored me, whom God has put in power. St. Paul, who said that even an angel from heaven should be accursed who taught any other than the true doctrine, did not make an exception in your favor, to permit you to teach false doctrines. For he says: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" {Gal. 1:8}. Come down, then, from that apostolic seat which you have obtained by violence; for you have been declared accursed by St. Paul for your false doctrines and have been condemned by us and our bishops for your evil rule. Let another ascend the throne of St. Peter, one who will not use religion as a cloak of violence, but will teach the life-giving doctrine of that prince of apostles. I, Henry, king by the grace of God, with all my bishops, say unto you: "Come down, come down, and be accursed through all the ages."

## **Gregory VII's First Excommunication and Deposition of Henry IV**

(February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1076)

St. Peter, prince of the apostles, incline your ear to me, I beseech you, and hear me, your servant, whom you have nourished from my infancy and have delivered from my enemies who hate me for my faithfulness to you. You are my witness, as are also my mistress, the mother of God [Mary], and St. Paul your brother, and all the other saints, that your holy Roman church called me to its government against my own will, and that I did not gain your throne by violence; that I would rather have ended my days in exile than have obtained your place by fraud or for worldly ambition. It is not by my doing, but by your grace, that I am set to rule over the Christian world which was specially entrusted to you by Christ. It is by your grace and as your representative that God has given to me the power to bind and to loosen in heaven and in earth.

Confident of my integrity and authority, I now declare in the name of omnipotent God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that Henry, son of the emperor Henry, is deprived of his kingdom of Germany and Italy; I do this by your authority and in defense of the honor of your church, because he has rebelled against it. He who attempts to destroy the honor of the Church should be deprived of such honor as he may have held. He has refused to obey as a Christian should, he has not returned to God from whom he had wandered, he has had dealings with excommunicated persons, he has done many iniquities [sins], he has despised the warnings which, as you are witness, I sent to him for his salvation, he has cut himself off from your Church, and has attempted to rend it asunder; therefore, by your authority, I place him under the curse. It is in your name that I curse him, that laypeople may know that you are Peter, and upon your rock the Son of the living God has built his Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.