THE CLAIMS OF INNOCENT III TO AUTHORITY IN TEMPORAL MATTERS

by

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In the course of the secular struggle between the papacy and the empire, Frederick I fought out with Alexander III the claim of the emperor to intervene in disputed papal elections and was defeated. In the time of Innocent III the situation was reversed and it was the pope who claimed the right to intervene in disputed elections in Germany. Innocent pressed to their fullest extent the papal claims to temporal sovereignty in Italy. He encouraged the rulers of States to surrender them to the pope and receive them back as fiefs. Most important of all he asserted beyond any of his predecessors, his claims as vicar of Christ. His reasoned statements of the papal claims as embodied in Gregory IX collection of decretals, were the foundation of the thirteenth century development of the official ecclesiastical theory of the powers of the pope in temporal matters.

Innocent might claim to intervene in temporal matters; (I) as immediate secular ruler, for instance in the papal patrimony; (II) as feudal overlord; (III) as specially concerned with the fitness of the elected German ruler, the principal defender of the church, to be consecrated and crowned emperor; and finally (IV) as vicar of Christ, or as he sometimes styles himself of God, 1) with all the powers to govern the "saeculum" given to Peter.

1) Migne P. L. Vol. 214 p. 150. Dei, cujus... vices exercemus in terris p. 306 pontifex, qui non puri hominis sed veri Dei vicem gerit in terris.
I cannot attempt here to deal with the question of the originality of Innocent III claims, or of their previous historical development; precedents are to be found in most, if not in all cases. The important point to note is the systematic way in which the claims are pressed and justified.

I will now proceed to deal with Innocent's claims under various heads.

**Immediate secular ruler.** The marriage of Henry VI to Constance, the aunt and legal heiress of William II of Sicily, in 1184, altered the whole political situation in Italy and greatly to the disadvantage of the church. There was imminent danger of the environment of the papal patrimony by the possessions of a German ruler who was king of Sicily, lord of the greater part of central Italy, and very powerful in the north of Italy. In such a situation the popes might well fear that the bishop of Rome would in time be reduced to the principal bishop of the German empire. The fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent crusade temporarily eased the situation, but after the death of William of Sicily and the assertion by Henry of his claims as the husband of Constance, true friendship between the empire and the papacy became impossible. Although Coelestine III and Henry VI were formally reconciled in 1195, yet there was no real abatement of hostility, and whether the Roman curia was cognisant of the conspiracy against Henry VI or not, it seems clear from the energetic action taken after Henry's death, that it had prepared to push its temporal claims in Italy on a favourable occasion arising.

Henry died on the 28th September 1197, leaving an infant son Frederick II whose claims to the succession in Germany were abandoned by his mother Constance, anxious only to secure for him the Sicilian inheritance. Coelestine supported the rising against German rule in the March of Ancona which broke out on the death of Henry VI, and sent legates to secure the papal lordship of the March. Legates were also sent to Tuscany who assisted in the formation of a Tuscan league hostile to the empire. This was the situation when Innocent III was elected. Possibly he had been the power behind the throne in the action taken after the death of Henry VI. In any case he took up with