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The Concession of England to the Pope

(idea) by aneurin

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On the 13th July 1205 Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England died, creating a vacancy for the most senior position in the English church. Technically speaking it was the monks of Christ Church Abbey that had the authority to elect a new Archbishop, although it was customary for them to elect whomsoever the king nominated. Indeed King John had a specific name in mind, his close friend and advisor, John Gray Bishop of Norwich.

To summarise what is a complicated (and disputed) sequence of events, the monks secretly elected Reginald, their subprior and attempted to obtain papal approval of his appointment and when that failed, bowed to the king's wishes and in December 1206 elected John Gray. Unfortunately by this time both sides had involved Pope Innocent III in the dispute, who ended up supporting neither and at Viterbo on the 17th July 1207 consecrated his own choice, an Englishman named Stephen Langton.

King John refused to accept this appointment and as a result on Sunday 23rd March 1208 Innocent III placed the whole of England under an interdict. When that failed to persuade John to change his mind the pope excommunicated the king in November 1209. Although negotiations continued between the king and the papacy what eventually brought matters to a head was the Welsh revolt of 1212 together with the news that Philip Augustus of France was planning an invasion of England.

Agreement was eventually reached at Dover on the 13th May 1213 and a formal charter was signed on the 15th and later ratified at St Paul's Cathedral on the 3rd October in the presence of Nicholas, Bishop of Tusculum.

Under this agreement John surrendered the sovereignty of England and Ireland to the papacy (*do offer and freely concede to ... our lord pope Innocent and to his Catholic successors, the whole kingdom of England and the whole kingdom Ireland, with all their rights and appurtenances*) and promptly received them back from the pope (*now receiving and holding them, as it were a vassal, from God and the Roman church*) and agreed to pay seven hundred marks every year for England, and another three hundred marks in respect of Ireland.

This stratagem by which John conceded his kingdom to the pope was essentially a diplomatic manoeuvre by which he became reconciled to the church and brought the support of Innocent III. "*Henceforth Innocent III abetted the king unswervingly, even in his most arbitrary conduct.*"

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The Concession of England To The Pope

John, by the grace of God, king of England, lord of Ireland, duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, count of Anjou, to all the faithful of Christ who shall look upon this present charter, greeting.

We wish it to be known to all of you, through this our charter, furnished with our seal, that inasmuch as we had offended in many ways God and our mother the holy church, and in consequence are known to have very, much needed the divine mercy, and can not offer anything worthy for making due satisfaction to God and to the church unless we humiliate ourselves and our kingdoms:- we, wishing to humiliate ourselves for Him who humiliated Himself for us unto death, the grace of the Holy Spirit inspiring, not induced by force or compelled by fear, but of our own good and spontaneous will and by the common counsel of our barons, do offer and freely concede to God and His holy apostles Peter and Paul and to our mother the holy Roman church, and to our lord pope Innocent and to his Catholic successors, the whole kingdom of England and the whole kingdom Ireland, with all their rights and appurtenances, for the remission of our own sins and of those of our whole race as well for the living as for the dead; and now receiving and holding them, as it were a vassal, from God and the Roman church, in the presence of that prudent man Pandulph, subdeacon and of the household of the lord pope, we perform and swear fealty for them to him our aforesaid lord pope Innocent, and his catholic successors and the Roman church, according to the form appended; and in the presence of the lord pope, if we shall be able to come before him, we shall do liege homage to him; binding our successors and our heirs by our wife forever, in similar manner to perform fealty and show homage to him who shall be chief pontiff at that time, and to the Roman church without demur.

As a sign, moreover, of this our on we will and establish perpetual obligation and concession we will establish that from the proper and especial revenues of our aforesaid kingdoms, for all the service and customs which we ought to render for them, saving in all things the penny of Saint Peter, the Roman church shall receive yearly a thousand marks sterling, namely at the feast of Saint Michael five hundred marks, and at Easter five hundred marks, namely seven hundred for the kingdom of England, and three hundred for the kingdom of Ireland - saving to us and to our heirs our rights, liberties

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and regalia; all of which things, as they have been described above, we wish to have perpetually valid and firm; and we bind ourselves and our successors not to act counter to them. And if we or any one of our successors shall presume to attempt this, whoever he be, unless being duly warned he come to his kingdom, and this senses, be shall lose his right to the kingdom, and this charter of our obligation and concession shall always remain firm.

Form of the oath of fealty

I, John, by the grace of God, king of England and lord of Ireland, from this hour forth will be faithful to God and Saint Peter and the Roman church and my lord pope Innocent and his Successors who are ordained in a Catholic manner: I shall not bring it about by deed, word, consent or counsel, that they lose life or members or be taken captive, I will impede their being harmed if I know of it, and will cause harm to be removed from them if I shall be able: otherwise as quickly as I can I will intimate it or tell of it to such persons as I believe for certain will inform them. Any counsel which they entrust to me through themselves or through their envoys or through their letters, I will keep secret, nor will I knowingly disclose it to anyone to their harm. I will aid to the best of my ability in holding and defending against all men the patrimony of Saint Peter, and especially the kingdom of England and the kingdom of Ireland. So may God and these holy Gospels aid me.

I myself bearing witness in the house of the Knights Templars near Dover, in the presence of master H., Archbishop of Dublin; master J., Bishop of Norwich; G., the son of Peter Earl of Essex, our justice; W., Earl of Salisbury, our brother; W. Marshal, Earl of Pembroke; R., count of Boulogne; W., Earl of Warrene; S., Earl of Winchester; W., Earl of Arundel; W., Earl of Ferrieres; W, Briwer; Peter, son of Herbert; Warin, son of Gerold; on the 15th day of May, in the 14th year of our reign.

The various witnesses can be identified as;

- John Gray Bishop of Norwich
- Geoffrey Fitzpiers, 1st Earl of Essex
- William de Longespee, 1st Earl of Salisbury
- William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke
- Renaud, Count of Boulogne

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additional reference to the charter being signed "*in the presence of our venerable father, lord Nicholas, bishop of Tusculum, legate of the Apostolic See, and of Pandulf, subdeacon*".

The text of the response from Pope Innocent III, is taken from Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III, concerning England (1198-1216), Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1956. Page 178-183 and reproduced at the Vatican Connection website noted above.

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