

The History of the  
RENAISSANCE  
WORLD

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The History of the  
**RENAISSANCE**  
**WORLD**

From the Rediscovery of Aristotle  
to the Conquest of Constantinople



SUSAN WISE BAUER



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**For Daniel**





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# Preface

---

NOT LONG AFTER 1140 AD, the Italian scholar Gerard of Cremona traveled to the Spanish peninsula, hoping to find a rare copy of the thousand-year-old Greek astronomy text known as the *Almagest*.

His chances were better there than anywhere else in Europe. The southern half of the peninsula had been in Arab hands for centuries, and the ruling dynasties of Muslim Spain had brought with them thousands of classical texts, translated into Arabic but long lost to the vernacular languages of the West. The libraries of the city of Toledo, in the center of the peninsula, housed scores of these valuable volumes—and Toledo had now been recaptured by one of the Christian kingdoms of the north, meaning that Western scholars could visit it in relative safety.

Gerard found more than he bargained for: not just astronomy texts but classical and Arabic studies of dialectic, geometry, philosophy, and medicine; unknown monographs by Euclid, Galen, Ptolemy, and Aristotle; a whole treasury of knowledge. Overwhelmed, he settled into Toledo and set to work learning Arabic. “Regretting the poverty of the Latins in these things,” one of his students wrote, “he learned the Arabic language in order to be able to translate. . . . To the end of his life he continued to transmit to the Latin world (as if to his own beloved heir) whatever books he thought finest, in many subjects, as accurately and as plainly as he could.”<sup>1</sup>

Renaissance had begun.

THIS IS NOT a history of “the Renaissance.” Rather, it is a history of the *world* during the period that historians have often (although not universally) associated with a rebirth of interest in classical learning. As Gerard’s story shows, this rebirth began much earlier than the fourteenth century.

One of the first Italians to give a name to the reawakened interest in Greek and Roman learning was the poet Petrarch, who announced early in the 1340s that poets and scholars were ready to lead the cities of Italy back to the glory days of Rome. Classical learning had declined, Petrarch insisted, into darkness and obscurity. Now was the time for that learning to be rediscovered: a rebirth, a *Renaissance*.

Petrarch was lobbying, in a polite and academic but very pointed way, for the distinction of official Roman Poet Laureate—in that day, something perhaps equivalent to the Man Booker Prize or the National Book Award, a public recognition that he was an intellectual whose words should be heeded. As part of his campaign, he was placing himself at the head of an already-existing phenomenon. Since before Gerard of Cremona, Western scholars, many of them Italian, had been working through Arabic libraries, reacquainting themselves with Greek and Roman thinkers. So much of this intellectual groundwork had been laid already that many modern historians now speak of a “Twelfth-Century Renaissance.”

By 1340, in other words, renaissance was so far advanced that it had become visible. Historical eras are never recognizable when they begin; they can only be seen in hindsight. The Renaissance, as the following chapters will show, was rooted in the twelfth century. The twelfth century saw the real beginnings of the struggle between Church hierarchy and Aristotelian logic, a struggle which—reincarnated as a fight between scripture and science, creation and evolution—is still ongoing in the United States in 2013. The twelfth century saw the death of the Crusades, the rise of the Plantagenets, the dominance of the Japanese shoguns, *and* the journey of Islam into central Africa.

It was a century of renaissances, and that is where my story begins.

THE LAST CHAPTER of this history tells the story of the Ottoman attack on Constantinople in May of 1453, when the triumph of the Turks brought a final end to the Roman dream.

The cultural phenomenon known as the Italian Renaissance continued well after 1453; I do not go on, in this book, to chronicle some of its better-known accomplishments (the political philosophies of Machiavelli, the paintings of Michelangelo and Raphael, the inventions of da Vinci, the observations of Galileo). But in worldwide terms, by the time Constantinople fell, the Renaissance had begun to shade into new eras.

Like the Renaissance itself, those eras were not named by historians until much later. But the ground of the Reformation was seeded and had begun to sprout; the followers of the English scholar John Wycliffe and the Bohemian priest Jan Hus were already organizing against the authority of Rome. And the Age of Exploration was well under way. Twenty years earlier, the Portuguese captain Gil Eannes had finally pushed south past Cape Bojador. A decade after Eannes’s boundary-breaking journey, Prince Henry of Portugal sponsored the first slave market in Europe: a closely orchestrated, carefully publicized event meant to whip up widespread enthusiasm for further explorations into Africa.

The Turkish overthrow of the Byzantine Empire was a world-changer. As the historian Caroline Finkel points out, even the Turks were unsettled by



Constantinople's fall; the Ottoman chronicler Tursun Bey, the only Turk to describe the final battle, calls it a "veritable precipitation and downpouring of calamities from the heavens, as decreed by God Himself." The transformation of Constantinople into Istanbul is an end and a beginning, an exclamation point and new paragraph in the punctuation of world events.

But the transition away from Renaissance and towards the next phase of human history is, perhaps, even more apparent in the events of the year before. The Italian pope Nicholas V had just issued a papal bull called *Dum Diversas*. In recognition of the expense and effort that the Portuguese had put into exploring the African coast, the Church gave official approval to the enslavement and sale of Africans by the Portuguese crown—a sanction confirmed again three years later in the charter *Romanus Pontifex*.

Wooing the allegiance and support of the powerful king of Portugal, the pope had transformed slavery into an institution that all Europeans could profit from without guilt. Historians do not normally speak of the Age of Enslavement, but in hindsight we can see that the decrees of the 1450s shaped the futures of three continents and began a whole new story.



P a r t   O n e



# RENAISSANCES



## Chapter One

---

# Logic and Compromise

---

*Between 1100 and 1122,  
the Holy Roman Emperor and the king of England both defy the pope,  
and an archbishop makes use of Aristotle*

THE FIRST CRUSADE had just ended—and with it, an age.

Eight hundred years after the Roman emperor Constantine led his army against his own people under the sign of the cross, Christian warriors crossed the Bosphorus Strait as a unified army of faith, roused by the supreme leader of the one Christian church to fight against Turks advancing from the east. No sooner had the Crusade succeeded than the victorious Christian knights sacrificed their allegiance to the one true faith and claimed another membership. They were, first and foremost, not sons of the church but sovereigns of their own private kingdoms.

Among the many meanings of what it meant to be *Christian*, one would govern the next four and a half centuries: to be a man of God meant *power*.

THE RIPPLES of the First Crusade spread out from Syria, in a widening circle that lapped both east and west.

In England, the wrong king inherited the throne. William II, king of the realm since 1087, was out hunting when his companion—an experienced hunter named Walter Tyrrell—drew his bow at a stag and instead hit the king. William collapsed onto the arrow and died on the spot. Rather than sticking around and explaining what had happened, Walter (according to the English historian William of Malmesbury) “leapt hastily on his horse, and with good help from his spurs got clean away. Nor indeed was there any pursuit.” Instead, the rest of the hunting party, which included William II’s younger brother Henry, went back to London and crowned Henry king of England. The date was August 5, 1100.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Henry wasn’t William’s heir. The English throne should have gone to Henry’s older brother Robert, Duke of Normandy, but he was still on his

way back from the First Crusade. Before he could claim his crown, Henry invaded Normandy.

The two brothers met in battle near the Norman village Tinchebray; the Duke of Normandy's army was defeated, and Robert was captured and imprisoned for the rest of his very long life. He died in his eighties, still under guard. As for Henry I, he took the title of Normandy for himself, becoming (like his father the Conqueror) both king of England and Duke of Normandy.

His reign, which had begun through force and usurpation, now took a turn towards law. As one of his very first acts, he issued a new declaration: the Charter of Liberties. The first article promised that the "holy church of God" would remain free from royal control, its lands from royal confiscation. But the remaining thirteen articles were all directed towards his people—particularly towards the barons of England.

The barons: the newborn aristocracy of England. William the Conqueror had rewarded his Norman knights by dividing the newly conquered land up into parcels and handing it out. The Anglo-Saxon nobles—the *thegns*, or "thanes"—had once been second only to the royal family in power and influence. The wars of the Conquest had already thinned their ranks. Now, those who had survived found themselves deprived of their lands, left with only tiny private holdings of their own.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the thanes, the Norman barons did not consider themselves landowners, only *landholders*. William the Conqueror brought into England a new kind of kingship. As monarch, he claimed to own the entire kingdom: all English land, all Norman land, was the possession of the king. The barons were his "tenants in chief," and in return for their new estates, they owed the king a certain number of armed men for his use: the *servitium debitum*.<sup>3</sup>

This system was rooted in tenth-century Francia, where chaos and lawlessness had led the poor to serve their wealthier neighbors in exchange for protection. It became known as feudalism: an order in which service and payments (both money and crops) were exchanged for the right to live on, farm, hold a particular piece of land. In England, the feudal lords and their holdings were set down, by William the Conqueror's scribes, in a vast two-volume record known as the *Domesday Book*: a ridiculously ambitious attempt to record the condition and ownership of every piece of English land. Among the names of the feudal lords, barely one percent are Anglo-Saxon. The rest had come to England in William's service.\*

These barons now owed the *servitium debitum* to Henry. But they remained fiercely protective of their own aristocratic privileges, and the Charter of Liberties assured them that the new king would not extort additional payments

\*See Susan Wise Bauer, *The History of the Medieval World* (W. W. Norton, 2010), pp. 547ff.

from them, or prevent them from disposing of their own possessions as they wished.

It was an odd thing for a Norman-born king to limit his own powers—a recognition that twelfth-century England was at the beginning of a new era. But the Charter of Liberties was in reality a canny strengthening of Henry's hold on the throne. "Know that by the mercy of God," it began, "and by the common counsel of the barons of the whole kingdom of England, I have been crowned king." Henry was a usurper, crowned only with the support of the barons, and the Charter was designed to guard his power by keeping them on his side.

In fact, Henry intended to exercise as much authority as his people would allow. And, as soon became clear, more authority than the pope was inclined to grant him.

Like his predecessors, Pope Paschal II insisted on the papal right of *investiture*—the power to appoint bishops throughout Christendom. Investiture was no small matter. The bishop of a city had authority over all of its ecclesiastical resources—land, money, and men. He had as much power as any secular count or nobleman to build, collect revenue, hire private soldiers, and generally empire-build within the monarch's own land. But unlike a count or nobleman, a bishop could not marry and pass his estate to his son; each bishop's death presented another opportunity for either pope or king to jockey into place a loyalist who would put those massive (and ever-growing) resources at the disposal of his master. Henry, claiming his rights as God-ordained, God-appointed, God-approved monarch of England, refused to give up this privilege.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the English church, disagreed.

Anselm of Canterbury, approaching seventy at the time of the First Crusade, was an innovator, an intellectual maverick. He had been educated at Bec Abbey in Normandy, where the well-known teacher Lanfranc taught in a monastic school: a "famous centre of learning," says the twelfth-century English historian William of Malmesbury, "where pupils on all sides were puffing out their cheeks and spouting forth dialectic."<sup>4</sup>

*Dialectic*: the rules of systematic thinking and inquiry laid out by Aristotle. Such an education was new to the twelfth century. Most clerics knew very little of Aristotle; the only works of the great Greek available to them in Latin had been translated by the sixth-century Roman philosopher Boethius, who made it only through the texts on logic before he ran afoul of Theoderic the Ostrogoth and got himself beheaded.\* Theoderic had merely intended to rid himself

\*For the career of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, who became king of Italy in the last decade of the fifth century, see Bauer, *The History of the Medieval World*, pp. 143–149.

of a traitor. Instead, he rid the West of Aristotelian philosophy. No one else undertook the project, so for the next five hundred years, Aristotle was known to the scholar-monks of Europe only as a logician. And Aristotelian logic was not highly regarded by most churchmen. It promised the careful thinker a way to arrive at true conclusions that would apply, universally to the whole world, without making any reference to scripture. Aristotle offered the possibility of truth without God, of reason without faith.

Both the ninth-century Irish theologian Johannes Scotus Erigena and the eleventh-century teacher Berengar of Tours had already made use of Aristotelian categories to argue against the doctrine of *trans-substantio*: the assertion that the bread and wine of the Eucharist, while remaining the same in appearance, changed in *substance* into the body and blood of Christ.\* Both men were roundly excoriated for daring to use Aristotle in the service of theology. Erigena, fumed the Bishop of Troyes, was a “master of error” who had dared to come to conclusions about “the truth of God . . . without the utterly faithful authority of the Holy Scripture,” and Berengar of Tours found his writings condemned by a series of church councils, over his objections that he was, in fact, an entirely orthodox son of the Church.<sup>5</sup>

But Aristotle’s ideas survived. Lanfranc, Anselm’s teacher, had studied logic in Italy before entering Bec Abbey: “He brought the liberal arts from Italy to France . . . and gave them fresh polish with his intellect,” William of Malmesbury tells us. Lanfranc taught his students at Bec to use dialectic as a tool for understanding revelation more clearly; and Anselm, studying beneath the master, found in Aristotelian logic a natural compatibility with his own ways of thinking.<sup>6</sup>

Anselm himself rose from student to teacher at Bec, and in those years he allowed the logic of Aristotle to penetrate further and further into his theology. He dared to ask why God should exist, in a day when no one asked such questions (an age, as G. R. Evans puts it, of “almost universal belief”); and he dared to search for answers using only reason. “I began to ask myself,” Anselm wrote, in the preface to his *Proslogion*, “whether *one* argument might possibly be found, resting on no other argument for its proof, but sufficient in itself to prove that God truly exists, and that he is the supreme good.”<sup>7</sup> *Resting on no other argument for its proof*: this was Aristotelian dialectic, applied to the most central beliefs of the Christian faith. Anselm, inheriting the benefits of several

\*The Aristotelian distinction between essence and accident required a rethinking of the whole idea of transubstantiation; medieval theologians began to develop “a new sense of the implications of the rules derived from Aristotle’s *Categories*, which recognizes that, although, by definition, accidents may alter (for that is the nature of accidents), the substance does not.” Interested readers can find a fuller explanation in G. R. Evans, ed., *The Medieval Theologians* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), pp. 90ff.



generations of very cautious scholarship, had struck boldly out past the existing theological frontiers.\*

He continued far into the unknown country, tackling not only the existence of God but also the particular Christian doctrines of incarnation and redemption, with reason alone. (“The following work,” he writes, in the introduction to the 1098 *Why God Became Man*, “. . . ends by proving by necessary reasons—Christ being put out of sight, as if nothing had ever been known of him—that it is impossible for any man to be saved without him.”)<sup>8</sup>

And as he did this, he continued to uphold, almost blindly, the right of the pope alone to appoint bishops.

Anselm spent his entire intellectual life on what must have felt like the edge of disaster: always willing to question what he had received, in faith that there was no tool of logic, no Greek syllogism, no Aristotelian category, that could shake truth. He must have feared, late at night in his rooms, that he was going too far; that one day the truth he held with all his might would indeed crumble in the face of his questions. But he continued to write and to reason.

And, perhaps to assure himself that he was still a good son of the Church, he remained, all of his life, the pope’s man. In 1093, William the Conqueror’s heir, William II, had nominated Anselm to be Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm agreed to the appointment. But he refused to take the *pallium*, the cloak that symbolized his office, from William II’s hand. Instead, he insisted that the cloak be placed on the altar so that he could then pick it up. According to the syllogism in his head, this meant that he had been appointed by the pope, not the king.<sup>9</sup>

Anselm’s loyalty meant that he stood staunchly for the papal right of investiture. Eventually, he and Henry fell out so sharply over the issue that Anselm, afraid for his life, fled to Rome. While he took shelter there, Henry continued to demand his rights, Paschal II to refuse them. “It lies heavy on us that you seem to demand of us something that we can by no means grant,” the pope wrote back to the king, “. . . You will say therefore, ‘This is mine of right.’ Not so, indeed for it belongs not to emperors or kings, but to God, it is His alone.” He added, ominously, “In this matter, we would have you contemplate what you lose.”<sup>10</sup>

Which was nothing less than salvation: Paschal II had the authority to excommunicate Henry, declaring him cut off from the Church, the sacra-

\*Anselm’s line of reasoning in the *Proslogion* is known as the “ontological argument” for the existence of God: he defines God, famously, as “that of which nothing greater can be conceived,” and attempts to prove that God necessarily exists because we are able to conceive of him. A useful summary for the nonspecialist is found in Alvin Plantinga’s *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 26ff.

ments, and their saving power. He could even place the entire country of England under an interdict. Churches would be closed, crucifixes draped with black cloth, the dead buried in unconsecrated ground—no Masses, no weddings, no bells. Interdict was a theological weapon of mass destruction, likely to make the king who had caused it grossly unpopular with his people.<sup>11</sup>

Henry I, involved in a serious war with rebellious barons in Normandy, finally decided that he couldn't fight both the pope and the Normans. In 1107, he agreed to a compromise; although only Paschal II could appoint English bishops, each bishop would have to go and pay homage to the king before he could take possession of the physical *place* in England where he would serve.

Although this still gave Henry some control over who ended up in bishoprics, Paschal II agreed, since it was clear that this was the biggest concession that the king was willing to make. But the pope saved some face by tacking onto the formal agreement, the "Concordat of London," a further provision. Bishops had to carry out the homage part only until the "rain of prayers" offered by the faithful softened Henry's heart and caused him to willingly abandon the practice.<sup>12</sup>

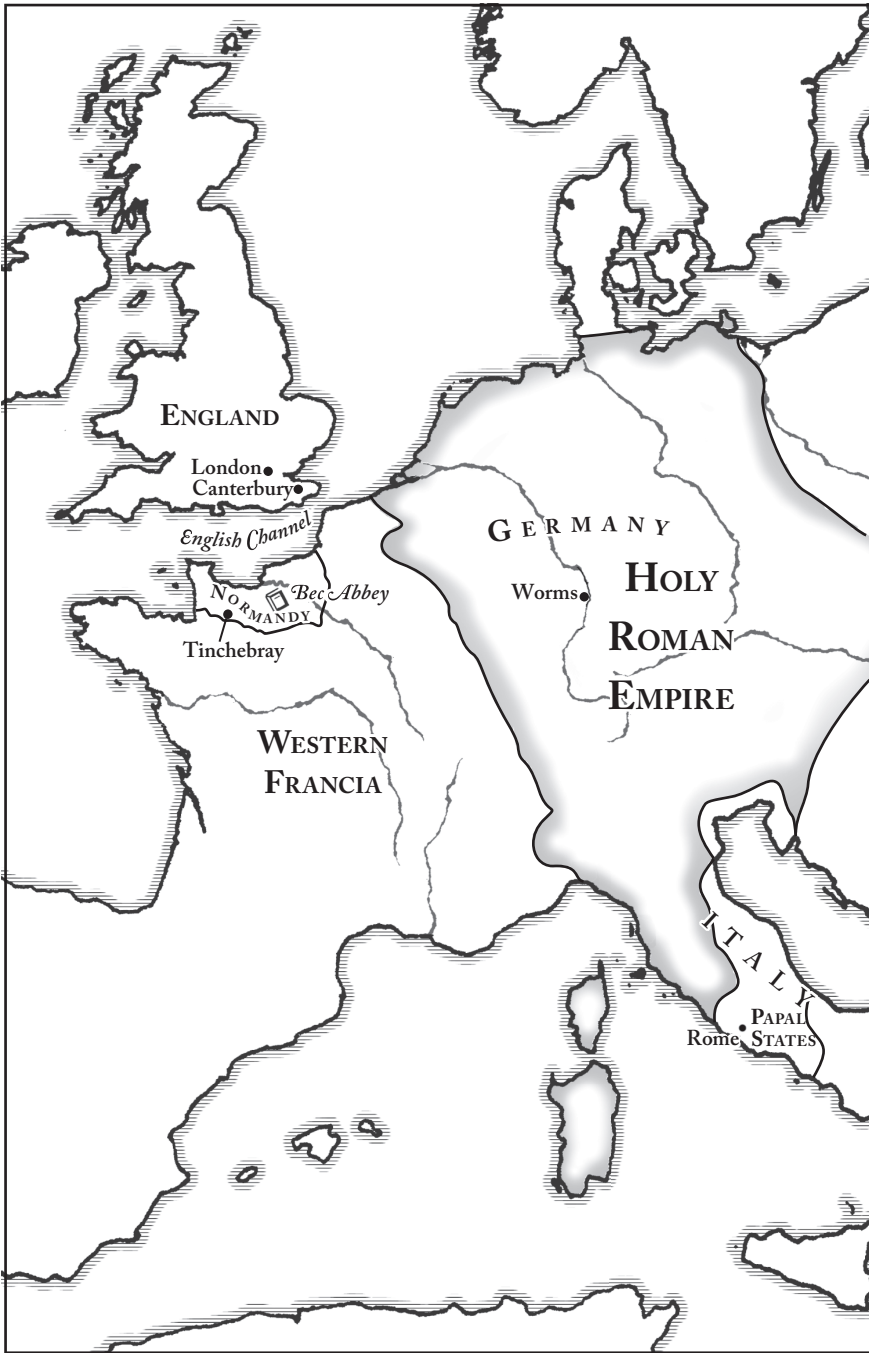
Henry agreed to the provision. Possibly he had less faith in the efficacy of the prayers than Paschal II.

This temporarily reconciled the pope and England, and Anselm returned to Canterbury, where he would serve just two more years before his death. But the struggle for supremacy was not over in England, merely in abeyance.

IN 1105, the strong-minded Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, abdicated. This left his nineteen-year-old son and co-ruler, Henry V, in sole control of the Holy Roman Empire: the uneasy collection, under a single crown, of German duchies and northern Italian cities.

It did not, however, make young Henry the emperor. Over the previous three centuries, an uneven tradition had emerged; the heir to the empire could assume power through the right of royal inheritance, but the actual title of Holy Roman Emperor was not awarded until the pope agreed to hold a coronation ceremony in Rome.

But once on the throne, Henry V showed himself to be just as strong-minded as his legendary father. He did not intend to trade power for papal recognition, and he was willing to delay his imperial coronation until the matter of investiture had been thoroughly discussed. He began to argue, with increasing heat, for the royal right to appoint clergy within the empire; and Paschal II, at first willing to make a few concessions to keep peace with the new ruler, continued to refuse.



*1.1 England and the Holy Roman Empire*

Henry V was a deep man, even at a young age, and he was playing a deep game. Looking around for his most natural ally, he settled on the king of England, still unsoftened by the rain of prayers directed his way. In 1110, he negotiated a betrothal between himself and the English king's nine-year-old daughter, Matilda, which brought him a very large dowry. Then, with Henry I's money, he assembled an army and marched down to the Papal States of Italy to bring the controversy to an end.

With a hostile army waiting just outside his borders, Paschal agreed to a compromise. Henry V would yield his right to appoint bishops, giving the pope the right to decide who would hold spiritual authority. But in return, Paschal would give back all of the lands, political perks, and privileges that had gotten entwined, over the centuries, with the bishoprics.

This neatly pulled apart the sacred and the secular privileges of investiture. The bishops of the empire might be under papal authority, but they would no longer control the vast tracts of land that had made them powerful. It was a victory for Henry, and Paschal knew it; he insisted on keeping the terms secret as long as possible.<sup>13</sup>

Henry V, still running on his fiancée's money, traveled to Rome in the early weeks of 1111, signed the agreement on the night of February 11, and then proceeded to St. Peter's the next morning to be crowned. At the beginning of the ceremony, the terms of the treaty were read out. This was an unwelcome surprise to most of the gathered bishops, who hadn't realized that the pope was willing to give away quite so many of their privileges. When the reading reached the central passage, the one that barred bishops (under sentence of excommunication) from profiting in any way from "cities, duchies, marks, counties, rights of coinage, rights of till, rights of market, militia, and castles of the kingdom," the bishops raised so much noise and protest that the reading stopped.<sup>14</sup>

In the face of such outcry, Paschal refused to hold to the terms. At once, Henry announced that, since Paschal wouldn't be able to carry out his side of the bargain, he, Henry, wouldn't give up the right of investiture. Paschal retorted that he wouldn't crown Henry emperor after all; at that point Henry ordered his men to take the pope into "protective custody" so that the bishops wouldn't harm their shepherd.

He hauled Paschal outside of Rome and kept him prisoner for two weeks, after which Paschal issued a new decree. "Your kingdom is connected in a singular way to the holy Roman church," it said. "Therefore . . . we concede to Your Love . . . that you confer investiture of crozier and ring on the bishops and abbots of your kingdom."<sup>15</sup>

Henry then allowed Paschal to declare him Holy Roman Emperor, and turned for home. He had won the quarrel, but the extorted agreement was

widely unpopular with both the churchmen and the German aristocrats in his own kingdom who feared his growing power. He spent the next decade putting down territorial revolts in Germany, stretched thinner and thinner by the constant warfare.

Paschal's death, in 1118, gave him a chance to back down with dignity. In 1122, after a long series of negotiations at the German city of Worms, Henry V and the new pope Calixtus II finally came to terms. Henry V, at long last, agreed to renounce the right of investiture, and Calixtus II agreed that, in Germany only, newly appointed bishops would do homage to Henry V as king *before* their consecration, thus assuring that in the heartland of the emperor, loyalists alone would wear the bishop's miter.

The Concordat of Worms, like the Concordat of London, was a pragmatic solution: a brief document, five paragraphs outlining Henry's concessions, four listing the privileges Calixtus was yielding. It answered none of the theological questions and solved none of the underlying conflicts. The knot of secular and sacred power had not been untwisted. It had merely been hidden, temporarily, beneath a thin covering of apparent agreement.

## TIMELINE 1

<u>PAPACY</u>	<u>ENGLAND</u>	<u>HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE</u>	<u>SYRIA</u>
		<b>Henry IV</b> (1053–1105)	
	<b>William the Conqueror</b> (1066–1087)		
	<b>William II</b> (1087–1100)		
Urban II (1088–1099)	Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1093–1109)		First Crusade (1095–1099)
Paschal II (1099–1118)	<b>Henry I</b> (1100–1135)	<b>Henry V</b> (1099–1125)	
	Concordat of London (1107)		
Calixtus II (1119–1124)		Concordat of Worms (1122)	