

Lesser Than God, Above Man
by
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Throughout the development of civilization, many questions have inspired considerable controversy. One of the most delicate questions has been and will continue to be humanity's estimation of its own worth. Over the ages this issue had generally become polarized into an optimistic view and a pessimistic view of mankind. During the middle ages, the scholarly were the elite and the elite examined this matter attentively. They were the aristocracy, noblemen, or the religious hierarchy. The Church approached the question of the human condition from a religious perspective, based upon writings in the Old and New Testaments. The Bible was the most influential book of that day. These scriptures discussed man as sinful, unworthy, and degrading to their Creator. With the exception of those who had "walked with God," the progression of the human race was overwhelmingly immoral. Augustine and his work the City of God is a classic example of a negative outlook toward human existence. His views of the historical development of civilization were pessimistic. Jesus Christ was considered the apex of all earthly history, his death marked an immediate and precipitate trajectory in the course from its inception. Augustine's treatises emanated from his understanding of the scriptures, and his works became exceedingly influential on medieval scholars. One of the most famous scholars of middle ages was Pope Innocent III. His religious career will be the focus of this study.

Lothair of Segni was born in 1160 or 1161, an Italian of noble lineage, belonging to the adjacent Patrimony of St. Peter in the twelfth century.¹ In his youth, Lothair studied theology in Paris and pursued a course in law in Bologna. His early training and expertise in medieval law proved to be a valuable asset in the future. Lothair was a canon of St. Peter's at Rome when in his thirtieth year he became a cardinal deacon of Saints Secgius and Bacchus (1190)², and in 1198 Lothair was elected pope. He took the name of Innocent, a somewhat misleading title for such a shrewd politician. Innocent III was the progenitor of an active papacy. Under his direction, the Church exerted a more vigorous

¹ Cheney, Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III. p. 23.

² Cheney, p. 18.

policy towards the domination of the secular world. In his model of the order of things, the Church was the center of the civilized world, Rome was the center of Europe, and the pope was the principle leader of all Christianity. Those nations which had not been enlightened by the presence and teachings of the Lord were considered barbaric and the rulers receptive of the Christian faith were considered by Innocent to be subordinate to his rule, for he was the spiritual leader of Christianity on earth. As pope, Innocent considered himself spiritually superior to his contemporaries; his personality was shaped to believe that humanity was intrinsically wicked. His distinctive character is ascendant in his many renowned writings.

On the Misery of Man was written by Innocent while he was still a cardinal, it is a superior display of Innocent's command of the scriptures. The Bible was the principal source for his thesis; mankind and his civilization are sinful. From birth to death, man corrupts all that is pure. In comparison to a twentieth century motif, this work is rigid, absolutist, and negative. It is a biased account of humanity based entirely upon contextual quotes from selected sources, combined with his own overbearing and cynical viewpoint. At the same time it is fascinating and occasionally truthful. His work is an ingenious composition that is hard-hitting, the reader can easily identify with many of the themes. Innocent is portrayed as wise, simultaneously he is unattractive to the modern-day scholar. His pervasive pessimism is so cogent that it causes pain to our sensibilities, in essence it is disturbing that he could be correct in his account of human nature.

"Who will change my eyes into the fountain of tears? Let me deplore the miserable beginnings of human existence, let me lament its sinful progress, let me mourn its end in damnation."³ The power in that passage is awesome, it articulates the attitude of Innocent. Man was born in sin, until he dies he is in a constant struggle to eke out a living, when he ceases to subsist his suffering only intensifies for all eternity. "Man has been formed of dust, has been conceived in sin, was born to punishment."⁴ Obviously, from the origin of the book, Innocent disputes the dignity of man. "He was born to labor,

³ Mannetti, p. 3.

⁴ Mannetti, p. 3.

to fear, to suffering and, most miserable of all, to death. His destiny is to be a putrid mass that eternally emits a most horrible stench."⁵ Humanity is continuously humbled in this work by the author. "'Therefore the Lord God formed man of dust of the earth.' (Gen. 2:7) All other elements are superior to the earth in dignity... For the fate of man and the fate of the beast is the same, as one dies so dies the other. Man has no advantage over the beast. All are from dust, and all turn to dust again.' (Eccles. 3:19-20)"⁶ Innocent intends that man should not be proud, we should be submissive to others who are spiritual, for humanity as a whole will never be exalted.

The brevity of life, the misery of old age, and the labor of mortals are poignantly examined by Innocent, "'Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and withers, he flees like a shadow, and continues not.' (Job 14:1-2)"⁷ Innocent's observation of the old is nearly comical, yet it is simultaneously tragic and to some who know an older person it may be truthful. "When one becomes old his breath smells, his nose drips continually, his hair falls, out his teeth rot."⁸ A reader can effortlessly picture in his own mind an old man, possessing characteristics as described by the author, and snicker sardonically at the imagined figment. Innocent immediately suggests that "what the young are now the old were before and the young will be what the old are now."⁹ As for the future of man, nothing is certain except that he will either become old, or die young. While he lives, his life will be vain, his mind will be afflicted, his body tormented. "'Great labor is created for all the children of Adam, from the day of their coming out of their mother's womb until the day of their burial into the mother of all.' (Eccles. 40:1)"¹⁰ Innocent portrays life on earth as transitory; it is meant to be harsh

⁵ Mannetti, p. 4.

⁶ Mannetti, p. 4.

⁷ Mannetti, p. 4.

⁸ Mannetti, p. 8.

⁹ Mannetti, p. 11.

¹⁰ Mannetti, p. 11.

in order that those who are spiritual can be rewarded, others are "weeded out" and cast into the lower regions.

Rich and poor, master and servant, everyone is ordained to a life of perpetual drudgery. "Consider the misery of a beggar, if he begs, he is afflicted with shame, if he does not beg he will be destroyed by poverty."¹¹ Not only is a poor man's life disgracefully stressful but "'All the days of the poor are evil.' (Prov. 15:15)"¹² No one escapes evil; the acquisition of wealth is totally consuming and the rich man is ruined by his abundance.¹³ "'Where thy treasure is, there also will thy heart be.' (Matt. 6:21)"¹⁴ Innocent's clear-sightedness is prevalent in these sentences as he makes a sweeping observation of all humanity. "We are valued according to our wealth although our wealth should be measured by our person. People are considered good and evil in the measure of their wealth though mortal wealth has nothing to do with our purses."¹⁵ What is the fate of the servant? "The servant is terrorized by threats, exhausted by service, afflicted by diseases and robbed of his goods."¹⁶ Masters, benevolent or devoid of human feelings, are confined to endure a subsistence marked either by driving anxiety or contemptuous derision. "If a master is cruel let him fear the hatred of his subjects, if he is lenient his insolent servants will despise him." The severe master is therefore tortured by fear; the kind master is the ridicule of worthless servants."¹⁷ The vision of the author transcends time, his wisdom is imparted to posterity. Who is truly happy? People who are sumptuously wealthy are despised by lesser men, but they are respected as a result of their affluence. Unpretentious and meager beings are loathed by the preponderant society. Hard

¹¹ Mannetti, p. 12.

¹² Mannetti, p. 15.

¹³ Mannetti, p. 15.

¹⁴ Mannetti, p. 14.

¹⁵ Mannetti, p. 15.

¹⁶ Mannetti, p. 15.

¹⁷ Mannetti, p. 16.

men are hated and gentle men are taken. Every man is tortured; he is in constant fear of losing what he has, or he is unable to satisfy the insatiable desire to possess more.¹⁸

Civilization, as Innocent envisioned, was notoriously unjust. Fate constantly reared traps and erected constraints, in order that humanity would be perpetually tormented with misfortune. Pious and honest men were persecuted, the innocent unfairly harassed, all faced struggles with depression, illness, and failure. Not one was excluded from their destined life of hardship. "Without warning calamity attacks, sickness takes possession and death -- whom no one escapes -- cuts us off."¹⁹ In the world according to Innocent, man's life was empty of pleasure and agony satiated the void. His attitude was fatalistic. Innocent agreed with the doctrine of Augustine. He saw the human existence as paradoxical, progressive but suppressive. As society modernized, humanity became more worldly and less heavenly. Man defied God increasingly as time moved forward. "Human nature becomes more and more corrupt every day. What was once healthy and wholesome is now because of its defects infested with death."²⁰ According to Innocent, man's advancement is the cause of his deprived state. The iniquity of man is correspondingly augmented to the enrichment of his earthly knowledge. Therefore, Innocent described humanity's tribulations as inherently created by humanity, not God. God only punished wrongdoing. "In the same manner every form of wickedness has its evil effect: the very pleasures of sin become the instruments of punishment in the hands of God."²¹

Innocent graphically foretold the future of the honest and good man as prevalent with persecution and injustice. "Often the innocent is condemned and the guilty absolved; the pious is punished and the impious honored."²² Those men who "desired to live a

¹⁸ Mannetti, p. 18.

¹⁹ Mannetti, p. 27.

²⁰ Mannetti, p. 27.

²¹ Mannetti, p. 20.

²² Mannetti, p. 29.

godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.' (II Tim. 3:12)²³ Just men, traditionally, were afflicted with mockery and scourging. He goes on to say that even the saints were ridiculed, imprisoned, and became martyrs for adhering to their faith. Innocent urged humanity to strive towards personal spirituality, the just man, "'denies himself. (Luke 9:23) He crucifies his flesh together with its passions and desires so that the whole world is crucified to him and to the world.' (Gal. 5:24, 6:14)"²⁴ The attainment of earthly frugality by the good man was wrong because these possessions were in essence fraudulent. Real wealth was spiritually acquired by the just man who, "tolerated the world as an exile. He has no lasting city here but seeks the one to come."²⁵ Obviously, Innocent believed that people should be more desirous of personal spirituality, rather than obtaining personal wealth. Man's greed afflicted others with poverty. His own corruption led to injustice. The total sum of civilization's spiritual, moral and ethical deficiencies synthesized into humanity's iniquity, suffering, and eternal damnation.

In his, On the Misery of Man, Pope Innocent III constantly articulated that mankind was sinful. All the elements of the sinful condition are responsible for humanity's problems. Historically, man has progressed technically, but his spiritual development has faltered. Innocent stated that if we, as people, end our sinful practices, we will automatically become more spiritual and our troubles will reciprocally decrease. People should strive for salvation, not wealth and power. A religious or spiritual leader would best guide his subjects toward eternal prosperity.

Unfortunately, in his book, the composer never addressed the question of who would be the best-suited to rule. What characteristics would a ruler possess? Should the leader be a philosopher-king or should he be authoritarian. Interestingly enough, Innocent declined to discuss secular and ecclesiastical leadership in his work. One might speculate as to his reasons for not approaching this topic. For any contemporary, it is difficult to comprehend exactly what a person of the past felt and thought. By examining his text, the

²³ Mannetti, p. 20.

²⁴ Mannetti, p. 20.

²⁵ Mannetti, p. 20.

reader can discern the author's biases. Innocent did have a noticeable perspective. The Bible was very influential, as were the writings and philosophy of Augustine. Innocent doubtlessly fashioned his treatise after the writings of the Bible, the central source of his inspiration. Innocent was religiously biased in his view of human nature, he felt it was intrinsically sinful; but were ecclesiastical and secular leaders ordained by divine providence to rule? If so, who was the natural or best qualified to assume the office of the supreme sovereign? These questions will be specifically addressed throughout this paper, to explain Pope Innocent's policy motivations while he ruled the papacy.

If a modern governmental official publicly denounced the entire government of which he was a member, that criticism could reflectively discredit himself. For Innocent, while he was still a cardinal, to write that the secular leadership and the ecclesiastical hierarchy were all corrupt, sinful, and unjust, that allegation could have traumatically hindered his own ambitions within the Church. Today, such an action of deliberate alienation with the "establishment" would be political suicide. As pope, Innocent never degraded secular rulers as ardently as he debased the commoner. He would have lost valuable credibility by denouncing secular rulers in those Christian nations.

Innocent did believe that secular rulers and pontiffs were predestined by God to rule on earth. Not only did this give rulers esteem, it also strengthened their power in the realm. Finally, Innocent believed that the spiritual leader of the Church should be the primary ruler in all of Christendom. The pope would exert control over all Christians, naturally included were kings, princes, and nobles who were participants of the faith. On the Misery of Man perfectly advocated Innocent's claim. While Lothair never specifically mentioned that kings and other temporal leaders should be subordinate to the pope, the book laid the groundwork for his very important premise. Innocent portrayed humanity as evil and salvation could only be atoned through Jesus Christ. As pope, Innocent proclaimed that he was the "Vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Peter -- the mediator between God and man."²⁶ He was responsible for everyone's soul, therefore he was supreme. If Innocent was a man (and he was), was he also so saturated with iniquity as other men were? By defiantly declaring that he, as pope, was "less than God, but greater

²⁶ Powell, p. 13.

than man,"²⁷ Innocent excluded himself from humanity.

Innocent felt he was uniquely dissimilar to the average man, he did believe that divine providence had distinctively chosen him to rule on earth. In many of the letters by the pope to King John of England, Innocent proclaimed that his ascension to the throne was predestined, after an extended order of great religious leaders. "Jesus Christ, a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech, (Ps. 109) has so established in the Church His Kingdom and His priesthood, as is testified by Moses in the Law and by Peter in his Epistle; (Exod. 19:6, I Pet. 2:9) and over all He has set one whom He has appointed as His Vicar on earth..."²⁸ Innocent further proclaimed that, "All secular kings for the sake of God so venerate this Vicar that unless they seek to serve him devotedly they doubt if they are reigning properly."²⁹ The message clearly contended that Innocent was chosen to be pope by God; his heritage as the spiritual leader on earth was linked to the prophets of the Old Testament and to Jesus Christ and Peter of the New Testament. More significantly, Innocent insisted that secular rulers were mandated by God to revere and comply to the commands of His Vicar on earth.

As Christ's Vicar, Innocent devised a plan to dominate Europe. This grandiose scheme was formulated by a very ambitious man. Innocent was dualistic; he was spiritually pious and politically pragmatic. He possessed tremendous leadership and charismatic qualities, which supplemented his precise and orderly mind. Pope Innocent III was a very complex man, he had an intricate goal. As pope, he wanted to dominate the ecclesiastical and temporal worlds in a struggle to centralize Europe under his own undisputed throne. Innocent longed to elevate the papacy and diminish the power of the secular ruler. Christianity was the cohesive force, uniting the continent, and Innocent was Christ's guardian on earth, a symbol of spiritual superiority. He was supercilious and very devoted to his scheme to rule as the Vicar of Christ and as the Lord of the world. His grand strategy theoretically was inspired by the scriptures, on the doctrine of preceding

²⁷ Powell, p. 47.

²⁸ Cheney, p. 177.

²⁹ Cheney, p. 177.

pontiffs, and on his own personal credence.

Innocent wanted to govern Europe from what he perceived as its core, Rome. "Rome was the first rank of the universe," it "held both the keys of heaven and the government of earth."³⁰ Rome was symbolically established as the capital of Christianity and Innocent felt he was the ruling official. "The Lord had given Peter not only the whole church to rule, but also the whole world."³¹ As pope, he felt he was solely responsible for the redemption of all man's sins on earth; he was to act judiciously in their punishment in accordance to their offensive actions. He spoke fearlessly of his "principate over the whole land, whoever opposes it makes himself an enemy of God."³² Essentially, he was responsible for everyone's eternal destiny. Innocent cleverly fortified his argument as omnipotent through logical observations of the scriptures. He also stated that the papacy was supreme by borrowing the practice of arguing the validity of the famous Donation of Constantine. Historically, the monarchy acted on the principle that it occupied the true political authority, extensively included were the clergy as well as the laity. In order to reverse these trends of continuous secular subjugation, Innocent worked tirelessly. His relationship with the politics of England is an exemplary illustration of an active papacy, exerting its power in the ecclesiastical and temporal affairs of the state, subsequently weakening the power of the secular ruler.

England was not always a major concern on Innocent's agenda, "the business of the Empire, the conquest of Constantinople, the heresy of the Albegensians -- these were some of the preoccupations which usually pushed English affairs into the background."³³ When England became intertwined with the central interests of the pope, the island-nation and its affairs emerged to the forefront. These issues were those connected to European peace and unification, the crusades, and most importantly, papal authority in the Christian spiritual

³⁰ Powell, p. 14.

³¹ Powell, p. 47.

³² Powell, p. 47.

³³ Cheney, Innocent III and England, p. 274. The business of the Empire refers to the Holy Roman Empire; the heresy of the Albegensians was a crusade launched by Innocent against that rebellious faction.

and lay interests. Our main source of reference will be letters from Pope Innocent III to important public officials, considerable bishops, and to the English monarchy.

An important power possessed and used by the pope was the power to exonerate one from an oath. In a letter to King John of England, March 1201, this power was used by Innocent in regards to John's oath to King Philip Augustus of France.³⁴ Innocent made the oath void, "Philip had no power to release you from the duty by which you are bound to your nephew, the renowned King Otto."³⁵ King Richard had promised monetary support to Otto, at his death John inherited this oath; and by apostolic letter, Innocent commanded his Majesty to give Otto the help and favor which he owed him -- the oath to Philip was to be disregarded.³⁶ John was pressed by the pope to foster his plan of delivering the throne to Otto. In a subsequent letter, Innocent chastised John for his continued failure to support Otto. "We wish by paternal warnings to recall from evil a king of your humanity and earnestly to encourage you towards goodness."³⁷ Innocent warned John that his offenses against the Church were not unnoticed, and that the Church would by no means hesitate to carry out their duty as is fitting -- after such prolonged waiting and fatherly warning.³⁸ During this time, France and England were involved in a struggle on the continent. Philip had been conquering much of the Norman lands in 1203 when the pope encouraged him to stop.³⁹ Innocent wanted to cease the warfare because he feared the

³⁴ This oath was consummated by the treaty of Le Goulet John swore to Philip not to help Otto in any way, without the assent of Philip. Otto was backed by Innocent, in his struggle against Philip of Swabia to ascend to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. Innocent supported Otto because he wanted to compromise and dominate the Empire by helping Otto become emperor.

³⁵ Cheney, Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III. letter 8.

³⁶ Cheney, letter 8.

³⁷ Cheney, letter 17.

³⁸ Cheney, letter 17.

³⁹ Philip had taken to arms to punish John, who had broken his oath to his lord (Philip). Philip argued against papal interference because it was a dispute over feudal rights between himself and his vassal.

conflict would encourage an attack from the Saracens.⁴⁰ Innocent claimed papal jurisdiction was fitting because if any oath had been broken, that action was considered a sin.⁴¹ He went on to write to Philip, "we entreat your Majesty, we exhort you in the Lord, we charge you as you hope for remission from your sins, to make an enduring peace with King John."⁴² For a short while, the war was halted, but not before Innocent exerted his power and influence. He involved himself in a feudal dispute and was able to claim the right to examine the matter on his ecclesiastical position. In a later letter to John, the pope urged the English monarch to meet with Philip in his court, to be judged for his actions in France.⁴³ Innocent advised John to make amends with Philip so that Christendom would flourish in those lands.⁴⁴ Innocent then wrote to Philip as well as the archbishops and bishops of France that the Church had the right to take part in these deliberations, "when a treaty of peace is made between kings and confirmed on both sides by an oath and yet was not kept for its full duration, how can we fail to take cognizance of a sworn obligation so that the broken treaty of peace be remade."⁴⁵ What superficially was a secular dispute, of feudalistic doctrine, was explained as a matter of sin, clearly allowing church commitment.

Traditionally, in England, monarchs had dominated the clergy. They had seized church lands and funds, persecuted clerics and other officials, and often chose office holders in high and powerful positions. A main goal of Innocent was to return papal domination to Rome, in regards to those ecclesiastical affairs in England. He wished to choose officials based on his own criteria, autonomous of monarchical subversion. The

⁴⁰ Cheney, letter 19.

⁴¹ Cheney, letter 19.

⁴² Cheney, letter 19. Innocent implied that he was responsible for his soul (Philip), therefore he had jurisdiction.

⁴³ Cheney, letter 20.

⁴⁴ Cheney, letter 20.

⁴⁵ Cheney, letter 21. Any treaty hence would fall into the jurisdiction of the Church if based on an obligation.

struggle between John and Innocent over the choice of the Archbishop of Canterbury proved to be a stubborn one, not ending before interdict and a papal victory in the battle between wills. When Archbishop Hubert Walter perished in 1205, John quickly hastened Reginold of Cornhill as his replacement. Innocent squashed the election and consecrated Stephen Langton as the new archbishop despite royal objections.⁴⁶ King John implicitly claimed a veto, refused to confirm his appointment, or to allow Langton to enter England.⁴⁷ The stage was set for another conflict. Innocent moved decisively. He wrote to John and scolded his insolence and impotence.⁴⁸ Innocent claimed that the king had no right to interfere in ecclesiastical concerns, reciprocally, John claimed the pope hadn't any right to intrude in secular affairs.⁴⁹ The pope warned John, "To fight against God in a church cause for which St. Thomas,⁵⁰ that glorious martyr and archbishop, recently shed his blood, would be dangerous to you -- the more so, as your father and brother of illustrious memory, when they were kings of the English, adjured that evil custom at the hands of legates of the Apostolic See."⁵¹ This powerful response by Innocent to John was only to be the initiation of the encounter. Another letter was issued to all the nobles of England that stressed the commitment of the pontificate to the controversy, "for we do not shrink if occasion demanded, from fighting to the death for the justice of this cause, do not intend to withdraw our apostolic hand from the defense of ecclesiastical liberty."⁵² John remained steadfast, he began to seize church lands and assume church funds. Innocent worked to negotiate a peace with John, but his anger mounted -- it became prevalent in subsequent letters. John was offered one of either two choices, "either a blessing leading to salvation

⁴⁶ Cheney, Innocent III and England. p. 298

⁴⁷ Cheney, p. 298.

⁴⁸ Cheney, Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III. letter 29.

⁴⁹ Cheney, letter 29.

⁵⁰ Thomas Beckett.

⁵¹ Cheney, letter 29.

⁵² Cheney, letter 29.

if you make reparation,⁵³ or a curse leading to ruin if you show contempt."⁵⁴ Inevitably, England was placed under interdict⁵⁵ in 1207, lasting until May of 1213. Innocent went on to excommunicate King John in 1212 based upon, " the question and issue concerns not merely the church of Canterbury, but the whole English church, by which your impious persecution you are trying to enslave."⁵⁶ In the same letter where the pope punished the king, he sent terms for reparations so that he could be forgiven. At this time, John was inspired to recapture lost greatness and lands in France, but for the venture he needed papal support.

John submitted to Innocent's terms, masking his own intentions. He had schemed to conquer Philip Augustus on the battlefield, John allied with leaders in Flanders and Germany (Otto), and asked for the pope's blessing. Innocent accepted John back into the fold eagerly, "to Him, who from evil is able to bring forth good, we render thanks for having mercifully inspired you to make fitting reparation for the losses and wrongs inflicted upon the church: an annual payment of 700 marks for England and 300 marks for Ireland."⁵⁷ Innocent also addressed a letter to the earls, barons and other magnates of England in which he admonished all from their past grievances against the church and commanded, "that you scrupulously show the king devoted loyalty and should wisely and openly assist him to defend and exalt the kingdom."⁵⁸ Innocent plainly desired to unify the English state itself while absorbing it into the Roman community. While fate smiled on the policies of Innocent, she frowned on the aspirations of John. The allied invasion, spearheaded by John, had not been victorious, and in 1214, at Bouvines, Philip Augustus

⁵³ Reparations were to be given to the church in England.

⁵⁴ Cheney, letter 45.

⁵⁵ Interdict in England initially brought popular, as well as secret laity support to John. In the end it proved to disillusion the people even more from the crown. The English clergy loyally carried out Innocent's decrees, even though they sympathized with John.

⁵⁶ John had taxed the clergy and obstructed ecclesiastical elections. letter 45.

⁵⁷ Cheney, letter 53.

⁵⁸ Cheney, letter 55.

destroyed the English allies. This marked the end of John's quest to recapture the Norman lands. It also marked a significant advance in the authority of the French monarchy, which surged ahead of Germany as the supreme continental power. The defeat of John in 1214 confirmed the disintegration of the Angevin Empire, more significantly, the event spurred on the creation of Magna Carta and the uncontested domination of the papacy over the English monarch. That same year the interdict had already been revoked and Langton became Archbishop of Canterbury. A larger victory was inherited by Innocent on the fifteenth day of May, 1213: the vassalage of England under the direct control of the papacy. This was an awesome achievement for Innocent, this occurrence correlated with his plans for European centralization. It was only natural that as the Vicar of Christ, the pope should rule all of the Christian world. The heading of the letter to John by Innocent, in accordance to the vassalage of England, reflected the personality of the writer.

"Innocent, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to his Well-Beloved Son in Christ, John, Illustrious King of the English, and to his legitimate Free Born Heirs forever."⁵⁹ The pride instilled in that address is unmistakable, bordering on arrogance. In the letter, John took an oath of fealty to the pope, agreed to do homage for the pope, and conceded to pay tribute to the Roman Church. These concessions were undertaken before John's escapade against Philip, when it ended in disaster, John, to his own demise, was unable to shake the papal chains encompassing his throne. Humbled by Philip and Innocent, John was powerless to prevent the conception of Magna Carta, which was prompted by the English monarch's failures domestic and abroad. The document was an attempt to limit the abuses of the monarch that were committed against the English barons. Magna Carta demanded "a written guarantee of good law and just government based on the Coronation Charter of Henry I, which had been confirmed in 1154 by Henry II. In June, 1215, John submitted to the demands and affixed the seal to the famous declaration. The three great conflicts of John's reign: with Innocent, with Philip Augustus, and with the English barons ended in momentous failure for the English monarch.

Innocent wanted to control Europe spiritually and politically because he felt it was duty as the Lord's Vicar on earth. But politics were often inherently temporal concerns,

⁵⁹ Cheney, letter 67.

not spiritual in nature. Innocent wanted to specifically extend papal jurisdiction into the secular arena. Nowhere is this more evident than in the papal condemnation of Magna Carta. The letters dispatched to England, by Innocent, showed that he disclaimed the document on political grounds, not ecclesiastical. "He had seen no need to justify in detail his censures, Innocent gives the modern enquirer no explicit answer framed in the language of the canon law."⁶⁰ A letter to the nobles of England from the pontificate in a discussion of Magna Carta stated, "we utterly condemn it, you have dared to form leagues or conspiracies against him and presumed arrogantly and disloyally by force of arms to make claims."⁶¹ The letter went on to threaten excommunication to any and all involved in a treasonous act. Another open letter suggested that the nobles had been inspired to break the oath of fealty to the Roman Church.⁶² Close observation of these letters leads to one basic conclusion: Innocent feared Magna Carta would loosen his grip on England; motivated politically, he condemned this great document to preserve a newly-created status quo. As before, Innocent cleverly concealed his political motives behind the sanctity of the altar, his exalted title, and the Holy Scriptures.

By examining documents written from Innocent's own hand, we can see that he was a man of great ambition. At the same time he was spiritually pious. On the Misery of Man clearly indicated that Innocent felt humanity was inherently sinful. His papal letters to England show that he was politically active. The premise formulated by Innocent was that he was spiritually supreme on the earth. Therefore, he should be superior to secular rulers in power. Innocent wanted to centralize Europe under the banner of Christianity, he was the leader of the Church and of the world, as ordained by God. He headed the papacy which occupied more power and influence in the temporal affairs of European monarchs than any other preceding pontiff. Innocent's political prowess, charismatic leadership, and pragmatic intelligence were a few of his great character traits that enabled him to succeed where

⁶⁰ Cheney, Innocent III and England. p. 282-284.

⁶¹ Cheney, Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III. letter 74.

⁶² Cheney, letter 82.

others failed. In conclusion, Innocent, as evident in his writings, described his preeminence as uniquely excluded from the wickedness of humanity. His promotion to the papacy was predestined by God; he was ordained to rule as the Vicar of Christ and Lord of the World.

document on political grounds, not ecclesiastical. He had seen no need to justify in detail his content. Innocent gives the reader a clear and explicit answer framed in the language of the canon law.¹⁰ A letter to the nobles of England from the pontiff in a discussion of Major Cana stated, "we surely envision if you have dated to form leagues or conspiracies against him and presumed arrogantly and dishonorably by force of arms to seize the chair."¹¹ The letter went on to threaten excommunication to any and all involved in a treasonous act. Another open letter suggested that the nobles had been inspired to break the oath of fealty to the Roman Church.¹² Close observation of these letters leads to one basic conclusion: Innocent's Major Cana would loosen the grip of English monarchs politically, he considered this great document to preserve a newly-created status quo. As before, Innocent clearly concealed his political motives behind the sanctity of the altar, his exalted title, and the Holy Scriptures.

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¹⁰ Gregory, Innocent III and England, p. 282-284.
¹¹ Gregory, Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III, letter 74.
¹² Gregory, letter 83.

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