

**1) Background to the argument – Long Term causes**

**a) Growing power of the Pope**

- Popes like Clement VII tried to increase their authority over kings. Henry II thought that after Stephen's reign the Church had become too powerful and threatened his position as king of England by interfering in kingly matters.



**b) Church Courts**

- Henry believed in a fair law system. He brought in several changes to the civil law system such as travelling judges, juries and jails. He banned trial by ordeal and took steps to stop the system of sanctuary. His next challenge was the Church courts.
- In Europe it was common practice for the Church to deal with churchmen who committed crimes in Church courts rather than the King's court. (2% of the population qualified as clerics.) Having been found guilty, even for serious offences such as murder, they were often given lenient punishments. (Over 100 murders were committed by Churchmen between 1154-1164). Church Courts were limited by canon Law (Church law) as to the punishments they could give out. Punishments of death or mutilation were banned. Punishments that were given by Church courts were; demotion of a cleric, suspension, expulsion from the Church, taking a penance, or excommunication. However although this **benefit of the clergy** was practised in Europe, traditionally it was rarely used in England where Churchmen were more often than not dealt with in the King's court. This situation had changed during Stephen's reign when Stephen argued with the Pope and gave in on the Benefit of the Clergy, allowing the Church to deal with its own wrong doers.



*Cleric, Clergy = Priest, Monk, Bishop, Archbishop*

**c) Henry had other concerns about the Church courts!**

- Often **clerks escaped justice** by fleeing the country or in some cases buying off the court.
- It appeared very easy to buy yourself into the church to avoid trial in a civil court.
- Even menial monastery workers were granted the '**benefit of the clergy**'.
- **Henry believed all this to be unfair.** He referred to them as "**Criminous Clerks**"
- However, this was just part of a **bigger question**. Who was really in **charge of England: the king or the Church?**



Henry and Becket



**Question 1 (Section 1a)**

Why was Henry II concerned about what Popes were doing?

---

**Question 2 (Section 1b)**

What changes had Henry II introduced to the civil legal system?

---

---

**Question 3**

Complete the following sentence.

In \_\_\_\_\_ it was common practice for the \_\_\_\_\_ to deal with churchmen who committed crimes in \_\_\_\_\_ courts rather than the \_\_\_\_\_ court.

**Question 4**

What percentage of English people could be classed as clerics? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5**

What punishments could Church courts **not** hand out?

---

**Question 6**

What punishments could you expect from Church courts?

---

---

**Question 7**

What was the name given to the right churchmen had to be tried in Church courts?

---

**Question 8**

What did Henry II call churchmen who committed crimes? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 9**

Complete the following

Often **clerks** \_\_\_\_\_ by fleeing the country or in some cases \_\_\_\_\_ the court.

## **2) The start of the argument between Henry II and Thomas Becket.**

- a) Henry realized that the Church would not give in easily over the Church courts matter.
- b) In **1161** Theobald, the **Archbishop of Canterbury** died. **Henry** wasted no time and **elected** his Chancellor and good friend **Thomas Becket** to the position, no doubt thinking that his man on the inside would help his plans to deal with '**criminous clerks**'.
- c) Henry might well have been following the example of the Emperor of Germany whose chancellor was also his chief Archbishop!
- d) Becket was reluctant to take on the job and warned Henry that he may live to regret this appointment. "**You may come to hate me as much as you love me now**". Becket realised that his new job would bring him into conflict with the king. (Either Archbishop or Chancellor – not both)
- e) Henry insisted on Becket becoming Archbishop of Canterbury.
- f) **Becket became a changed man**. He resigned as Chancellor, he gave up his excellent standard of living, with good food, clothes and homes, and started to lead a changed life, praying and fasting much of the time. He fed the poor, gave away great amounts of money and instead of having cheerful music played at meal times, he had Latin religious books read aloud. He changed from "*a patron of play actors and a follower of hounds to become a shepherd of souls*".
- g) Almost immediately Henry and Becket were to argue and a friendship was on its way to ending in a terrible tragedy. Both men were incredibly stubborn.
- h) Becket appeared to be hell bent on conflict with Henry.
  - i. He excommunicated a baron without asking Henry's permission.
  - ii. He ordered a baron to pay homage to him in regard to a dispute over land.

After pressure from Pope Alexander III and the Bishops of London and Chichester, Becket made his peace with Henry, but this was in private. Henry wanted it down in public!

### **Question 10**

Who died in 1161? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Question 11**

Who did Henry II choose as his replacement? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Question 12**

Which other ruler had the same man as his chancellor and archbishop?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Question 13**

What warning did Becket give to Henry II when he was made Archbishop of Canterbury?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Question 14**

Give three examples of how Becket changed on becoming Archbishop of Canterbury?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) Henry and Becket met at what was called the **Constitution of Clarendon in 1164** and Henry suggested a few changes:- (Some examples)

- a. Churchmen could be **tried in church courts**, but if found **guilty** they should be defrocked (*dismissed from the Church*) and handed over to the **King's Courts** for suitable punishment.
- b. **Churchmen accused of crimes could not leave England** without the King's permission.
- c. No king or baron could be **excommunicated**. (*not allowed to be part of church and attend services*)
- d. All **appeals** should be made to the King's Court and not to the Pope.



Becket at first appeared to agree to Henry's suggestions and the agreement was sent to the Pope Alexander III for approval. However, Becket then changed his mind and refused to accept any of Henry's proposals. Henry was becoming angry and frustrated with Becket and realized that he had made a mistake in making Becket Archbishop of Canterbury. Becket had to go!

#### 4) **Council of Northampton 1164,**

Henry then accused Becket of stealing money when he was Chancellor. It would appear that Henry was trying to force Becket into resigning. Becket fearing for his life, fled in disguise to France.

#### **Question 15**

At what meeting did Becket and Henry meet in 1164? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Question 16**

What was Henry II's suggestion about how guilty churchmen should be dealt with?

---

---

#### **Question 17**

What other suggestions did Henry make at this meeting?

---

---

---

---

---

---

#### 5) **Becket goes into exile 1164-1170**

Henry asks Pope Alexander III to dismiss Becket as Archbishop. Becket turns up in Rome, accuses Henry of breaking Church laws, but then resigns blaming himself for the trouble. The Pope immediately reinstates him. The Pope wants reconciliation. He doesn't want to upset either Henry or Becket. (*He needed their support as there were currently two Popes Alexander III and Victor IV*)

The argument became personal. Henry had all Becket's property and possessions in England seized. Over 400 of Becket's friend and families were forced to leave England (Not even Henry I had done this when he quarrelled with Anselm and sent him into exile).

## 6) The Coronation of the Younger Henry

In 1169, Henry wanted to have his son Henry crowned in order to avoid any dispute upon his death. Normally, the Archbishop of Canterbury would carry out the coronation. Henry and Becket met. Once again Becket agreed to Henry's wishes to change the Church courts but then added "saving our order". Henry was getting to the end of his tether. Henry instructed the Archbishop of York to carry out the coronation. *(Henry had been granted permission by the pope in 1161 to allow any archbishop to crown his son)* Louis of France was brought in as an arbitrator of peace. Even Louis was surprised at Becket's behaviour saying to Becket "are you trying to be more than a saint?"

## 7) Henry and Becket resolve their differences.

Under the threat of Papal sanctions, *(punishment from Pope)* Henry and Becket met at Fréteval in July 1170. Both agreed to a compromise *(deal)* that neatly ignored the original cause of the dispute and allowed Becket to return to England and re-crown Henry the Younger in a second ceremony.

It was not a popular reconciliation. Henry the Younger himself refused to meet Becket when he arrived at Windsor. Becket himself was now in a delicate position. He needed to recover his authority in England and avoid becoming a yes-man of the king. On his arrival in England, he immediately excommunicated his old enemies, including the Archbishop of York who had crowned Henry the Younger.



*Excommunication of Archbishop of York*

The news of what Becket had done reached Henry as he was celebrating Christmas in France. He was furious and announced half-heartedly "***Is there none of you cowards whom I feed at my table who will rid me of this turbulent priest!***" Four knights at the feast, **Hugh de Morville, Reginald FitzUrse, Richard le Breton and William de Tracy**, took Henry at his word and crossed the Channel to England, making their way to Canterbury Cathedral, where they intended to force Becket to return with them and face the King's anger.

### Question 18

During which years was Becket in exile? \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 19

What did Henry II ask Pope Alexander to do in 1164? \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 20

Who did Henry ask at first to crown his son Henry? \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 21

Who eventually carried out the crowning? \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 22

What question did King Louis ask of Becket? \_\_\_\_\_

## 8) MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL 29<sup>th</sup> December 1170 By Edward Grim

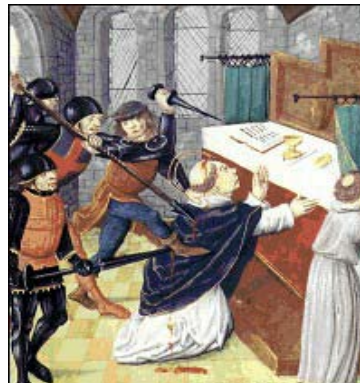
*It was only a few days after Christmas. It was shortly before 4pm and we were getting ready for the evening service when four knights arrived. Believing that they were carrying out the King's wishes, they forced their way in and told Thomas to leave the country. He refused saying "If you threatened me with all the swords in England you could not stop me doing my duty to God." The knights left but we saw them outside putting their armour on. We tried to persuade Thomas to flee, but he calmly went ahead with the evening service, leading the procession into the cathedral. He wouldn't even let us bolt the door.*

*Suddenly the Knights burst in. "Where is the man who has turned against the King?" one shouted.*

*Thomas answered quietly, "I'm here, I have not turned against the King, I am just a priest doing God's will. What do you want?"*

*"Your death!" came the reply and Reginald FitzUrse, one of the knights, lifted up his sword. I rushed forward with a cross to protect Thomas, but the sword came down on my arm cutting it almost to the bone. I fell bleeding and helpless. A second knight, William de Tracy, hit Thomas on the head with his sword. As he fell to his knees a third knight, Richard le Breton, struck him so hard that he cut off the top of his head, spilling his brains on the floor and breaking his sword.*

Other Witnesses:- William FitzStephen and William of Canterbury.



### 9) WHAT WERE THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF BECKET'S DEATH?

- There was a **limited storm of public outrage** over the death of Becket.
- Henry was **ashamed and locked himself** inside a room for three days.
- The Pope **prohibited Henry from taking mass** until he received forgiveness for his sin. He was under threat of excommunication himself.
- The **four knights were excommunicated** and then sent on a crusade, their eventual fate is uncertain.

On Sunday 21st May 1172, Henry performed a ceremony of public penance at **Avranches Cathedral**

### 10) LONGER TERM CONSEQUENCES OF BECKET'S DEATH

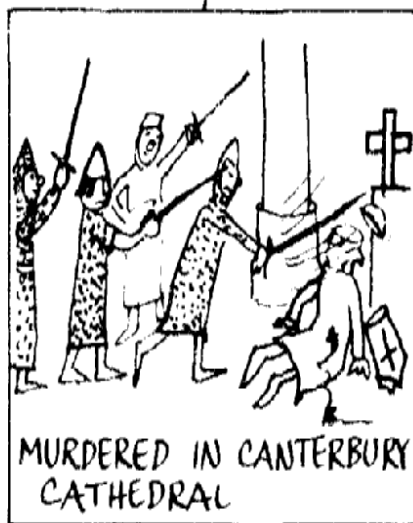
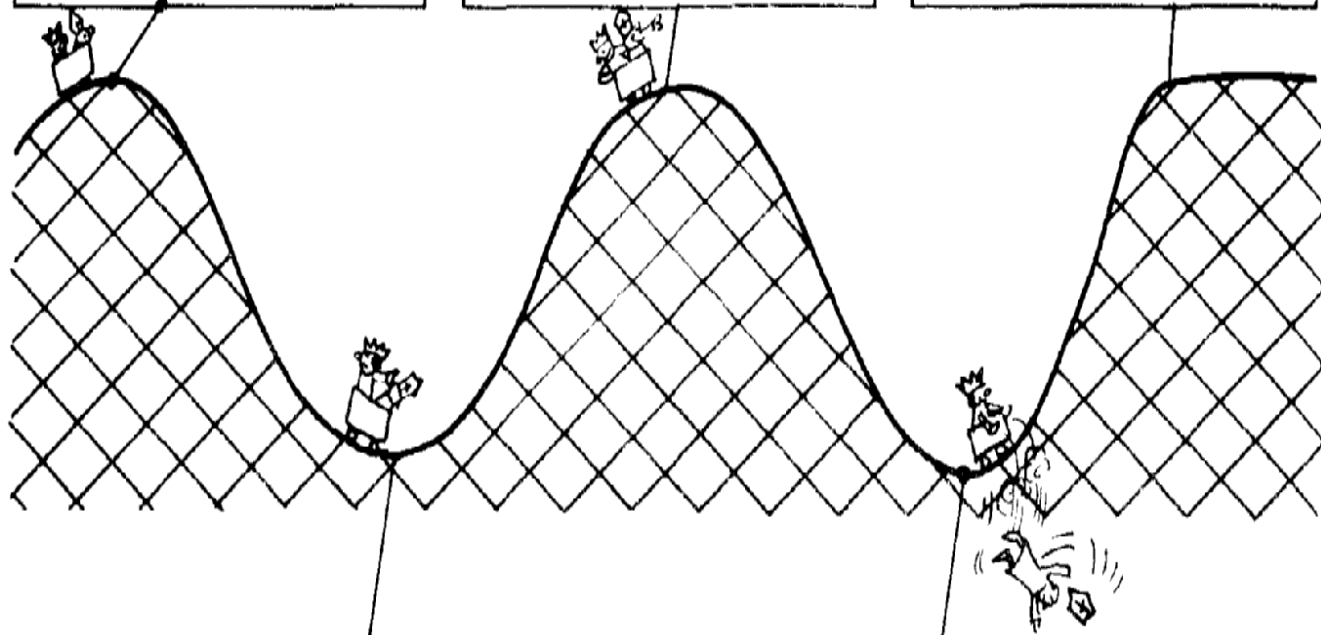
- Henry was **flogged** by every monk in Canterbury and had to wear a horse hair shirt for a penance.
- Henry failed to get his way with regard to Church reform and had **to submit to the Pope**.
- Henry promised to send **200 knights on a crusade** to the Holy Lands.
- The **Constitutions of Clarendon were cancelled** and the Church remained as strong as ever.
- Henry promised to **restore all property** to the church of Canterbury
- Henry promised **not to obstruct any appeals** to Rome by the clergy
- **Becket became a martyr**, probably the most influential martyr in the history of the English Church. He was made a saint in 1173. Thousands of pilgrims flocked to his tomb at Canterbury Cathedral.
- However, many Historians believe that **England was better off** without the contentious Becket.



On the face of it, Henry lost little by this compromise. Although, he could still appoint bishops, he was unlikely ever to interfere in appeals to the Pope. At the bottom line, he was forced to give in on the problem of 'criminous clerks', and this fundamental concession would create problems between Church and future kings right down to the Reformation three centuries later when Henry VIII took decisive action.



# THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THOMAS BECKET



# CHRONICLERS OF THOMAS BECKET'S MURDER

## EDWARD GRIM

Had recently been appointed as a clerk to Becket. He stood by Becket whilst all the others fled (except FitzStephen). He was injured in the attack. Probably wrote between 1175 and 1177.

## WILLIAM FITZSTEPHEN

One of Becket's clerks. He lived for 10 years in Becket's household. He claims to have stood by Becket during the murder. He wrote some time before 1177.

## JOHN OF SALISBURY 1110- 1180

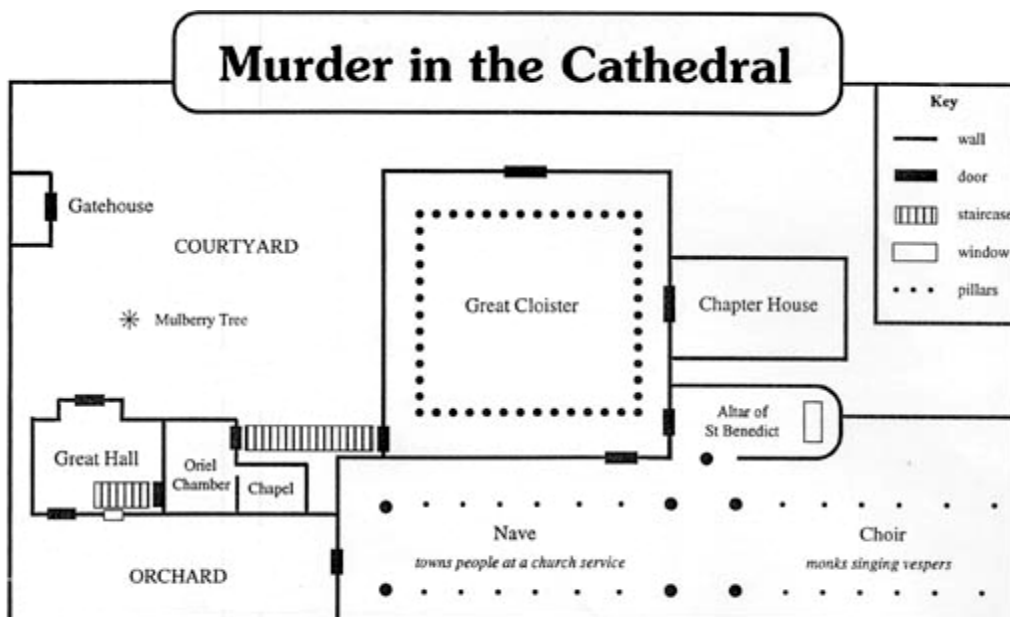
One of Becket's best friends and advisor. He wrote immediately after the event. Not present at the murder. John of Salisbury supported Becket in his conflict with Henry II and in 1164 he was forced to leave the country. Later John of Salisbury wrote a short biography of Becket.

## WILLIAM OF CANTERBURY

A monk who described himself as being present at the time of the murder, but admits with sorrow that he fled and hid behind a nearby altar as the final blows killed Becket. He probably wrote in 1171.

## HERBERT OF BOSHAM

Another of Becket's friends and supporters. He was away on the day of the murder, having been sent on a mission by Becket. On describing Becket's murder, he had to rely on evidence from others. Old age, poor memory, a tendency to believe gossip and a wish to make a comparison between the deaths of Christ and Becket leads to inaccuracies. He wrote between 1184 and 1185.



# The Story of Thomas a Becket

Thomas a Becket was cruelly murdered by the henchmen of Henry II, John's father. When John was six, Becket was canonized but it was not until after John's reign by 1220 that Becket's shrine in Canterbury was completed.

1 Thomas a Becket was born in 1118 into a modest family of traders; shortly before Thomas's birth, his mother Maelda dreamed she carried in her womb the whole church of Canterbury, and, strangely as the midwife delivered the baby, she held him high in the air and cried "I have raised from the ground a future bishop."



2 As he grew up, Thomas proved a bright and able scholar. At an early age his father commended him to be educated at Merton Priory. After Merton he finished his schooling at Paris and London.

3 With his great change, a great change came over Thomas. He cast off his expensive robes for rags, gave money to the poor of the city, and to Henry's dismay, became his former friend's most formidable opponent.



4 The king and the new chancellor spent much time together hunting and riding and many wild tales Thomas did not conduct himself in the manner of a man of the cloth. When the king travelled abroad, Thomas took charge of the kingdom with the aid of the king himself. His friendship with the king helped Thomas become bishop of Canterbury.

5 When the knights arrived in Canterbury, Thomas refused to flee. Instead he protected to the cathedral for vesper, ignoring the pleas of the ignorant monks. "We shall not!" Thomas cried with the house of food into a castle.



6 The four knights hurriedly made their way to the cathedral where they found the doors wide open just as Thomas had instructed. Reverently they barged into the church, shouting "where is Thomas a Becket the traitor!"

7 "If you seek the Archbishop I am here" came a calm voice and the knights rushed forward. In the same calm voice he continued "I am prepared to die. I prepare an assent to my life. I ask, however, that my followers are not punished."

8 With this final defiance, the knights struck but the arm of Edward Grim, the last of the Archbishop's supporters.

9 Thomas's new attitudes led to many furious arguments. Henry tried to assert his authority over the church, but Thomas said "In dread judgement, day we shall both be judged as servants of one lord, for temporal lords should be obeyed but not against God."

10 They struck and struck again and as Thomas lay dying, one knight put his foot on the fallen Archbishop's neck and thrust his sword deep into the bloody wound. The terrible deed was done and Thomas lay dead on the altars steps of the cathedral.



11 At the age of 21, he joined the house of Theobald Archbishop of Canterbury where he impressed his superiors so much that he was sent to Bologna in Italy to study further.

12 The bitter quarrel loosened and soon Thomas fled to the continent but even here Thomas made a nuisance of himself writing angry letters to the king's supporters.

13 After years in exile, Thomas and Henry finally made peace but soon after his return the two friends were quarrelling again, and Thomas started to excommunicate the king's supporters from the church.



14 When the dreadful news reached the king in France, he locked himself in his room for days. He deeply regretted his rash words and launched the murder.

15 This angered the king and one day at court in France he cried in temper, "Will no one rid me of this upstart priest?"

16 No sooner had the king uttered these fateful words than four young knights seized their swords and rode off towards the coast. Eager to please the king they planned to sail for England and find Thomas AND MURDER HIM!



17 In 1173, Thomas was canonized and became known as saint Thomas a Becket and his shrine at Canterbury was a popular destination for pilgrims for many centuries.

## **Explain who was right: the King or the Church**

This is a tough question and there is no “right” answer. Instead think about these ideas, talk it through with the class and make your own decision. Argue the case from both sides

### **Intro:**

#### **Show what you know. (SWYK)**

- Row about 2 main points: Church law changes & Church’s power.
- Henry wanted to change Church law, Becket wanted to keep Church law and power safe, and argued that Henry had no right to tell Church what to do.

#### **Showing where you’re going (SWYG)**

- Each believed he was right.
- Both Henry and Becket were stubborn and made mistakes.
- Pope was sitting on the fence, protecting his position.
- Division amongst English bishops. Bishop of London hated Becket, Bishop of Chichester wanted peace

#### **Paragraph 1. BECKET RIGHT.**

- His duty to protect the Church power:
- Pope = head of the Church, not the king. So Church should not be told what to do in England by the king.
- Becket warned Henry that he would serve Church first, and had turned down A of C job first of all.

#### **Paragraph 2. HENRY RIGHT**

- Church law was too soft and people pretending to be Churchmen.
- Henry had made royal law more modern; only fair that Church law be improved too.
- Church courts undermined Royal authority
- Constitution of Clarendon was really just a new version of old agreement made between Henry I and Church.
- Becket was wrong to challenge Henry’s power as king so much, like he did about young King Henry’s crowning. It made Henry look weak.
- Becket should have been loyal to Henry as Henry had made him important.
- Murder was a mistake — Henry did not want it.

### **Conclusion**

- Depends on view point (looking at what was good for England or Church v. King)

#### **ENGLAND - HENRY RIGHT:**

- a) Church law = unfair and royal law had already been updated
- b) B wrong to challenge H’s authority as king so often.

#### **CHURCH v KING - BECKET RIGHT:**

- a) Church = international, independent organisation
- b) Becket’s duty was to future of Church, not to Henry.

## **Explain why Henry II quarrelled with Becket.**

**Bold** = point, *Italics* = expl, normal = proof, underlined = linking words

Henry II(1154 -1189) became king after the chaos of the Stephen and Matilda civil war. His reform of the law and creation of the Angevin Empire made him one of England's greatest medieval kings. However, he was to fall out with his Archbishop Becket over two main points: his wish to change Church law and their differing views of Church power. Personality would also play a part, for both were stubborn men

**The main point that Henry and Becket argued about was Henry's Church law changes.** *This was because the Church had its own law and courts separate from the king; this was known as 'The Benefit of Clergy'.* Henry had already made Royal law more modern. Now he wanted to do the same to Church law. Therefore in 1163 at Westminster Henry demanded that guilty churchmen be sent to Royal courts. This was because Church law was too soft, for instance murderers were only sacked or sent on pilgrimage. Therefore some people pretended to be churchmen to avoid the tougher royal courts. However Becket was against this as it was unfair to be tried twice. He also argued that churchmen were under God's law only.

**Another cause of the row was their disagreement over the church's power in relation to the king.** *This was because Henry thought that the Church should support him. However Becket thought that the Church was free of the king.* Therefore in 1164 Henry showed Becket the Constitutions of Clarendon. This would change Church law, but it would also take the Church's power back to Henry I's time. However Becket, having first agreed, refused to accept them. This was because Becket wanted to protect the Church and Henry's changes would weaken the Church. Moreover ( the king had no right to tell Church what to do

**The argument was made worse by their characters.** *This was important because each was in charge of his organization.* Both men were very stubborn and hot tempered. This is why Becket did not try to make the deal that the Pope told him to after the Westminster meeting. Moreover they had been friends. Also Henry had made Becket important as Chancellor and then Archbishop. Therefore Henry was very angry that Becket had not helped him. So Henry ordered Becket's trial in 1164. It is also true that it was Becket's breaking of the 1170 deal not to punish the other's supporters that would lead to Becket's death

The row went on until December 29th 1170, when Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral by four knights who thought that Henry wanted him arrested after his earlier outburst in Normandy. I think that the most important reason for the row was their differing views of Church power, for Henry felt that the Church had to be seen to be loyal to the King, but Becket believed that it was his duty not to allow of the Church's power to be taken away.

## EXPLAIN THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ARGUMENT FOR THE KING AND CHURCH

### INTRO:

Murder result of Henry's anger at Becket's public challenge to the king's power as well as his betrayal in refusing to help Henry. Row also about the wider point over the relationship between king and Church. So either king or Church had to gain from Becket's death— Church did as it kept its power safe and made itself wealthier and more popular

**The Church gained more as it kept its power safe from the king.** *This was because Henry could not push through his changes as it would have seemed that he had wanted Becket dead.*

Church used Becket story (propaganda?) to remind people of how wrong Henry had been to interfere with it and that King had no right to increase his power over it, (that's why B = saint so quickly, tomb = pilgrimage site)

Constitutions of Clarendon had to be dropped. In 1172 Henry promised Pope not to try to take away Church's power

Henry had to show public sorrow — 1174 pilgrimage; public acknowledgement of Church's power.

**The Church also benefited from the row as it increased its wealth and public support.** *This is because people believed that Becket was a martyr*

Church gained money and popularity — pilgrims to Canterbury, buying relics, giving money/land etc to Church. Still pilgrims going there in late 1300s (we know from Chaucer's book "Tales", written then

### Conclusion

Becket did more for Church dead than alive; alive he had split the English Church (i.e. excommunications and suspensions), dead he helped it to stay free of the king. Keeping its independence was the most important gain for the Church. As in most rows, Church won — John didn't learn Henry's lesson

**Explain the consequences of the argument between the King and the Church (this also means who gained more: the King or the Church).**

**Intro:**

Everyone shocked by B's murder on 29 December 1170.

4 knights sent on pilgrimage to holy Land - 3 died.

Church gained the most.

**Point 1. Church gained more money + support**

- Becket made saint in 1173
- Thousands of pilgrims to B's tomb (relics, gifts) which was made into shrine (by bishop of London!)

**Point 2. Church kept its power safe.**

- Ch used B's story to tell people king should not order it about (maybe why B made saint so fast)
- H had to drop changes and promised Pope in 1172 not to change Church.
- H showed he was sorry and Ch was right in 1174 (whipped and prayed at B's tomb)

**Conclusion.**

I think that the most important consequence was.

## Henry II & Becket main events of the argument

1154	Henry II = king, (after Stephen and Matilda civil war)
1161	Theobald died
1161	Henry asked Becket to be Archbishop of Canterbury (his friend and Chancellor)
1162	Becket agreed to being Archbishop (warned Henry he would put Church first)
1163	At Westminster Henry wanted guilty churchmen to then be tried in a royal court after Church court (end of The Benefit of Clergy).
	Church law = too soft & so people pretended to be churchmen.
	B said no: 2 trials = unfair + ch law only.
	Pope deal?
1164	Constitutions of Clarendon: guilty Chmen to royal court + Ch's power back to H Ist. B yes then no, as Ch would be weaker + H had no right to tell Ch what to do.
1164	Henry ordered B's trial - stealing money. B ran away to Flanders (France) + Pope. B tried to get people to go against H.
1170	<b>June:</b> A of York crowned H's son next king: but it was A of Cs job, so B angry.
	<b>July:</b> H + B meet, + make peace.
	<b>Dec:</b> B back to England
1170	Becket excommunicated Bishops of Salisbury + London, + suspended A of Y for crowning H's son. Also excommunicated De Broc.
1170	Christmas: A of York went to Henry to tell him, + lied that B had own army H = v angry. 4 knights went to Canterbury
1170	<b>29th December:</b> B killed by be Tracy, Fitzurse, Breton, De Morville in <u>Canterbury Cathedral</u> .