

# King John and his argument with the Church - The Stephen Langton Affair

## CE – Religion B5 and B6

Green Topic

### 1) Background to why John and Pope Innocent argued

In July 1205, Hubert Walter, the Archbishop of Canterbury died. John believed that as king of England he had control over anything that went on in England. That meant that it was his right to choose his own Archbishop as previous kings had done. (*Precedent* = William I – Lanfranc, William II – Anselm, Henry II – Becket). He wanted continuity.

Archbishops of Canterbury were powerful men who the kings relied on for military support and advice. Kings needed archbishops whom they could trust to be loyal to the King first and to the Pope second!

Traditionally many Archbishops were elected from among the monks at Canterbury Cathedral. However, John wanted to choose his friend John Gray, Bishop of Norwich. (1204 had been a bad year with loss of Normandy and murder of Arthur? John was in desperate need of support and loyalty). The monks soon realised what John was planning to do and decided to elect their own archbishop called **Reginald**. Reginald was sent to Rome to be invested by Pope Innocent III. News reached John and he sent **John Gray** to Rome also to be invested.



Pope Innocent wanted **change**. He believed that the appointment of archbishops and bishops was a Church matter and nothing to do with kings! The Pope sent both men back to England saying that he would think the matter over.

### 2) The argument begins

By December 1206 the Pope rejected both Reginald and John Gray and decided to elect a third man called **Stephen Langton**. John was not happy with this for a number of reasons.

- a) John was King of England and he stated that he would choose his own Archbishop and not the Pope. By giving in to the Pope he would weaken his position. He was not prepared to give up this right. The barons might also see it as a further sign of weakness.
- b) Stephen Langton was a personal friend of Philip II of France.
- c) Stephen Langton, being a cardinal was the Pope's man and this might again threaten John's authority.

1. John refused to let **Stephen Langton** into the country and confiscated the lands of Canterbury Cathedral and collected its income.
2. The Pope **threatened** to put England under an interdict. John believed the Pope was bluffing and refused to budge. The Pope believed that the Interdict would force the people of England to rebel and force John to back down is his argument with the Pope. However, in order to put off the Pope from imposing the interdict, allegedly John threatened that in retaliation he would expel all bishops, priests and monks. On top of this, any of the Pope's servants who entered the country to carry out the interdict would have their eyes burnt out and their noses split!
3. In March 1208, the Pope, not willing to lose face, placed England under an interdict. All church services were suspended. Marriages, burials, christenings could not take place. Churches were closed down. Bells, chalices, sacraments etc. were packed away. According to the chroniclers, the people felt frightened as they relied greatly on the church for guidance. There were stories of dead bodies being left to rot in ditches.



4. Chroniclers say that the interdict caused great hardship in England. The interdict lasted for 6 years. But it didn't work. Some churches weren't closed, some opened again. Most people in England were annoyed with the Pope. They saw this as an argument between their king and the pope not them. They saw it as unfair that they were being punished and blamed the Pope not John. People were very loyal to John. The rebellion that the Pope hoped might force John to change his mind did not happen because John was getting so much money from Church property, that he taxed the barons less.
5. **John reacts to the interdict by confiscating more church lands** and finances.
6. In November 1209, the Pope **excommunicated (toleratus) John**. This means that John is not allowed to go to church and have his sins forgiven. If he dies he will go to hell. The **excommunication was upgraded (vitandus)** which meant that the barons no longer had to follow John's orders. In order to combat this John's takes the sons/daughter of certain barons as hostages in order to ensure their continued support!
7. In December 1212, the Pope decides that John is unfit to rule England. He orders **Philip II of France to invade England** on a **crusade** and depose John. Philip's son Louis would replace John as king. Philip gathers an invasion fleet of 1700 ships. The country unites behind John and an army of 60,000 gathered on the south coast.
8. John is rumoured to have approached the Emir of Cordova and asked for military help. In return John is said to have promised that England would change religion to Islam. It is said that the Emir was not interested. (this is possible Church propaganda)
9. In January 1213, John realises that matters are getting out of hand. He could lose everything if the invasion was successful. A prophecy by a **hermit** called Peter of Pontefract said that John would not be king in May 1216. This worried John. Added to this there was a threat of internal baronial rebellion led by Robert Fitzwalter and Eustace de Vesci.
10. John wrote a **letter of concession** to the Pope, hoping to have the interdict and the excommunication lifted (1213). John did homage to a Cardinal and promised to rule England for the Pope and in his name. John's concession worked like a charm. A very clever move as Philip and the barons would have to take care about what they said or did to John.
11. Many barons were disappointed. One chronicler summed up the mood of the barons: 'The King hath degenerated himself to the level of a serf.'
12. John agreed to **allow all bishops** etc. back into the country.
13. John offered to pay back £100,000 of the money that he had seized from the Church during the dispute. Surprisingly, the Pope agreed to only £40,000
14. John agreed to pay an annual tribute of 1000 **marks** to the Pope.
15. **Langton** is elected **Archbishop** of Canterbury.
16. The Pope orders Philip to cancel his invasion, but Philip ignores this. He gathers a fleet together. John orders a successful attack on the French fleet.
17. As a result of this dispute with the Pope, John had not suffered too greatly and the election of the very capable Langton was not a major problem for John.
18. However, when John gave into the Pope at the end, it resulted in an increase in Papal taxation and interference in England until the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Question 1**

What happened in 1205 to trigger off the argument between John and Innocent III?

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**Question 2**

Who did John want as his next Archbishop of Canterbury?.....

**Question 3**

Why did John believe it was his right to choose his Archbishop of Canterbury?

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**Question 4**

Who did the monks at Canterbury want as the next Archbishop of Canterbury? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5**

Who did Pope Innocent choose as the next Archbishop of Canterbury? \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 6**

Why did John refuse to allow Stephen Langton into England to become Archbishop of Canterbury?

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**Question 7**

What is an interdict? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question 8**

What is excommunication? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Question 9**

Who did Pope Innocent order to invade England on a crusade and why did he give this order?

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**Question 10**

Explain why John gave up in the end

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## **Who benefited most?**

### **John**

- 1) John gained a good Archbishop.
- 2) John gained protection of Pope.
- 3) John retained much of the money which he has seized during the dispute.

Barons paid less taxes during dispute, they were happier. After dispute, attitude of Barons and the Church was more negative towards John.

### **Pope**

- 1) Got his way with his choice asserting his authority
- 2) More papal control/interference in England. Catholic Church maintained its position in England until Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1530's.
- 3) Granted annual sum of money.
- 4) Interdict damaged the position of the Church in England. The local priest now had a weakened hold on people.

## **Who was to blame? We need to look at it from both sides (points of view)**

- There was a long term history of dispute. William II, Henry I, Henry II and Stephen had all fallen out with the Church.
- Innocent had disputes with a number of European monarchs. Some disputes worse than that with John.
- Ultimately both men were defending what they saw as their right. It was not a personal argument.
- Both men were stubborn and not willing to back down.
- Both men made mistakes
- Fortunately, no long term damage was done.

### **John right**

- Kings of England had always chosen Arch of Cant. John was protecting the rights of English kings.
- John felt that he had the right to choose his bishops. After all they were major landowners in England; provided soldiers for John's army and he often sought their advice on various matters. He needed to rely on their trust and loyalty.
- John had right to refuse Stephen Langton – Friend of Pope and King of France.
- To his credit John did submit in the end. Some say that took courage or an example of diplomatic genius.
- Pope abusing his power by imposing the interdict. Why should the people of England suffer?
- Pope abusing his power when he asked Philip II to remove John from throne.
- Could the Pope have been more tactful with his selection of Langton? Was there room for a compromise early on such as Anselm and Henry I in 1106?

### **Innocent right**

- Church was an international organisation and should be free of the king's control.
- Change was needed. Innocent felt that it was his duty to uphold the Church's rights and that the choice of archbishops and bishop was a Church matter.
- Bishops were churchmen, who owed loyalty firstly to Pope and then their king.
- Pope Innocent following Pope Gregory VII's teachings. Pope was God's representative on Earth. Therefore Church matters were the concern of the Popes not Kings. Kings should obey the Pope in all matters

## Sample Essay 1

**Choose an argument between a king and Church.**

**Describe the main events of this argument (20 marks)**

**SYK Paragraph** (Show your knowledge)

The dispute that I have chosen to describe is that between King John and Innocent III, often referred to as the Stephen Langton Affair. This took place between 1205 and 1214.

**SWYG paragraph** (Show where you are going – Inform the examiner)

In July 1205, Hubert Walter, the Archbishop of Canterbury died. John believed that it was his right to choose his own Archbishop as previous kings had done.

However, John wanted to choose his friend John Gray, Bishop of Norwich. The monks at Canterbury soon realised what John was planning to do and decided to send Reginald to Rome to be invested by Pope Innocent III. News reached John and he sent John Gray to Rome.

**Paragraph 1**

By December 1206 the Pope rejected both Reginald and John Gray, and exerting his authority over John he decided to elect a third man called Stephen Langton. John was annoyed and refused to let Stephen Langton into the country and confiscated the lands of Canterbury Cathedral.

**Paragraph 2**

The Pope threatened to put England under an interdict, believing that the Interdict would force the people of England to rebel and force John to back down. John refused to change his mind and in March 1208, England is put under an interdict. All church services were suspended. John reacted by confiscating more church lands.

**Paragraph 3**

In November 1209, the Pope excommunicated John. The excommunication meant that the barons no longer had to follow John's orders. This had no affect on the situation. In December 1212, the Pope decided that John was unfit to rule England. He ordered Philip II of France to invade England on a crusade and depose John. Philip's son Louis would replace John as king.

**Conclusion/summary**

In January 1213, John realised that matters were getting out of hand and that he could loose everything. A prophecy by a hermit called Peter of Pontefract said that John would not be king in May 1216. Added to this there was a threat of internal baronial rebellion. John wrote a letter of concession to the Pope, hoping to have the interdict and the excommunication lifted. John's concession which, in effect, made England a fiefdom of Rome, worked like a charm. **John did homage to a Cardinal and promised to rule England for the Pope and in his name.** In 1214, John allowed Langton to enter England as Archbishop of Canterbury.

## Sample Essay 2

**Choose an argument between a king and the Church**

**Explain who do you think was to blame? (Who was right or wrong?) (10 marks)**

### SYK paragraph

There was a long term history of dispute of the "Investiture Contest". William II, Henry I, Henry II and Stephen had all fallen out with the Church. Innocent had disputes with a number of European monarchs. Some disputes worse than that with John.

### SWYG paragraph

Ultimately both men were defending what they saw as their right. It was not a personal argument. Both men were stubborn and not willing to back down. Both men made mistakes. Was there room for a compromise early on such as with Anselm and Henry I in 1106?

### Paragraph 1

John believed he was right. Kings of England had always chosen Archbishops of Canterbury. John had the right to refuse Stephen Langton as he was a friend of the Pope and King of France. To his credit John did submit in the end. Some say that took courage and was an example of diplomatic genius.

### Paragraph 2

Pope Innocent believed he was right. Change was needed. Innocent felt that it was his duty to uphold the Church's rights and that the choice of archbishops and bishop was a Church matter. Bishops were churchmen, who owed loyalty firstly to Pope and then their king. Pope Innocent believed the Pope was God's representative on Earth. Kings should obey the Pope in all matters.

### Conclusion/summary

Fortunately, no long term damage was done. The question as to who was right ultimately depends on one's viewpoint in other words looking at what was good for England or Church v. King. From England's viewpoint Innocent was wrong to challenge John's authority as king. However the Church saw it differently. Innocent was right to stand up to John because the Church was an international, independent organisation out of the control of a monarch and it was Innocent's duty to protect the future of the Church.

### Sample Essay 3

**Choose an argument between a king and the Church**

**Who do you think benefited most? / What were the consequences? (10 marks)**

#### SYK paragraph

In 1213, John's timely letter of concession to Pope Innocent brought their eight year dispute to a satisfactory conclusion. Both men breathed a sigh of relief and could now concentrate on more urgent matters.

#### SWYG paragraph

Who benefited most depends which point of view you look from. Both men would argue that they benefited most.

#### Paragraph 1

John believed that he gained most. By standing up to the Pope he had shown his strength of feeling for the English king's right to choose their Archbishop of Canterbury. John would argue that he also needed to defend his position so as not to appear weak to the barons and damage the authority of the king. In the end John gained a very good Archbishop in Stephen Langton. During the dispute John had pocketed much of the Church's money. He only had to pay back a fraction. As part of the final deal, John gained the protection of the Pope which would be vital in his conflict with both the English barons and Philip II of France.

#### Paragraph 2

Pope Innocent believed he gained the most. He got his way with his choice asserting his authority over John. He gained England as a fiefdom which allowed him to interfere more in England. The Catholic Church maintained its position in England until Henry VIII's break with Rome in the 1530's. The pope was granted an annual sum of money.

#### Conclusion /summary

As in most rows, between the Monarch and Church the Church won and John didn't learn from Henry II's lesson. In the end both men benefited. No long term damage was done and England was spared damaging arguments between King and Church for many years to come.

### Sample Essay 4

Choose an argument between king and Church.

Explain why the argument took place

(10 marks)

#### SYK paragraph Show your knowledge

In July 1205, Hubert Walter, the Archbishop of Canterbury died. John believed that it was his right to choose his own Archbishop as previous kings had done. This was one of the main points agreed by Henry I and Archbishop Anselm in 1106. John wanted continuity.

#### Paragraph 1

Traditionally Archbishops were elected from among the monks at Canterbury Cathedral. However, John wanted to choose his friend John Gray, Bishop of Norwich. John was in need of a loyal friend after a disastrous 1204. The monks soon realised what John was planning to do and decided to elect their own archbishop Reginald. Reginald was sent to Rome to be invested by Pope Innocent III. News reached John and he sent John Gray to Rome.

#### Paragraph 2

Pope Innocent wanted change. He believed that the Church was an international organisation and should not be interfered with by monarchs. He reopened the 'Investiture Contest'. He believed that the appointment of archbishops and bishops was a Church matter and nothing to do with kings! The Pope sent both men back to England saying that he would think the matter over. By December 1206 the Pope rejected both Reginald and John Gray, and decided to elect a third man called Stephen Langton.

#### Paragraph 3

John was not happy with this for a number of reasons. Firstly, John was King of England and he stated that he would choose his own Archbishop and not the Pope. By giving in to the Pope he would weaken his position. He would not give up this right. The barons might also see it as a further sign of weakness. Secondly, Stephen Langton was a personal friend of Philip II of France. Thirdly, Stephen Langton, being a Cardinal was the Pope's man and this might again threaten John's authority

#### Conclusion/summary

John refused to let Stephen Langton into the country. The relationship between John and Pope innocent deteriorated. An interdict was placed on England, followed by John's excommunication. The dispute only came to an end in 1213 when John submitted to the Pope under threat of an invasion by Philip II of France.

### Glossary of words

cardinal	A senior churchman, usually a bishop. Often represented the pope on journeys to other countries. They wear red caps and are responsible for electing a new pope.
change	When things alter from the way they have been done for years
continuity	When things continue as they have for years
crusade	A holy war waged by Christians against infidels (non –christians)
excommunication	Punishment handed out by Church, particularly popes and archbishops. Came in two forms, toleratus and vitandus
hermit	A priest or monk who chooses to live a life of total isolation, often in a cave or hut in the middle of nowhere.
interdict	When the churches are closed down on the orders of a pope. No services allowed to take place including burials, marriages and baptism.
toleratus	A form of excommunication in which the person excommunicated was banned from attending church to have his sins forgiven. If he died unforgiven he would go to hell. However people were still allowed to talk to him. This was a very powerful weapon of the medieval Church.
vitandus	Extreme form of excommunication in which not only was person banned from church but he was to be ignored/shunned by everybody. Anybody who talked to the person could themselves become excommunicated.