Late Medieval England
(c.1066-c.1534): Context

The Norman Conquest and Church Reform

That the history of the church in England was also the history of the state was never so strikingly demonstrated in the Middle Ages as in the outcomes of the Norman Conquest of 1066. William the Conqueror (1066-87) clearly regarded the Church as his own possession, to be managed in such a way as equally to serve the interests of God and king. The Conqueror's reign also coincided with an important reform movement in the western Church. William had been a patron of reform in his duchy of Normandy, and secured the appointment of one of its most distinguished proponents, Lanfranc, abbot of Caen, as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070. William's contemporary, Pope Gregory VII, radicalised the existing reform programme by asserting the superiority of the clerical order (see Orders of Clergy) over the laity and the supremacy of the papacy over emperors, kings and princes (see The Papacy). While ready to espouse the cause of moral and organisational reform, William I and his successors were concerned about the phenomenon of the over-assertive cleric, and Lanfranc's successor at Canterbury, Anselm, twice went into exile as a result of his quarrels with William II (1087-1100) and Henry I (1100-35). Over the following four and a half centuries, the lay and clerical powers were to engage in a seemingly endless sequence of quarrels, crises, accommodations and compromises out of which emerged a recognisably 'English' church known, at least from the thirteenth century, by the tag ecclesia Anglicana.

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Key:
Interactive glossary terms
Links to other pages on the DVD-ROM

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