POPES vs KINGS
Which one had more power during the Middle Ages?

Pope Leo III and King Charlemagne of the Franks

Popes and kings often had tumultuous relationships in the Middle Ages. However, under certain circumstances they were able to work together for the benefit of both. One example of this was the relationship between King Charlemagne of the Franks and Pope Leo III.

Leo was not the son of a noble. Instead, he was a commoner who had worked his way up through the hierarchy of the Church based on his merits. Leo was not popular with all of the Roman nobles. Many of them believed that only a noble should be named Pope. The Roman nobles made accusations against Pope Leo. An angry mob threatened to gouge out his eyes and tear out his tongue. Pope Leo escaped and fled north to the city of Paderborn where he met with Charlemagne.

Charlemagne was one of the most powerful rulers of the Dark Ages. His empire included much of western and central Europe. While Charlemagne was a great supporter of art, culture, and education, he was also a fearsome military leader. Leo's predecessor, Pope Adrian I had worked to establish a good relationship with Charlemagne. After he became Pope, Leo had written to Charlemagne hoping to secure support for himself as well. Charlemagne had replied that it was the job of the Frankish king to protect the Church and the job of the pope to pray for the king and his armies.

Charlemagne's forces escorted Leo back to Rome. There, Charlemagne held a council with both Pope Leo and the pope's enemies. Pope Leo took an oath of purgation - he swore that he was

innocent of any crimes. As a result of this council, the Roman nobles who opposed Leo were banished.

Then, two days later, on Christmas Day, 800 C.E., Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor of the Roman Empire. The Western Roman Empire had fallen almost 400 years before the crowning of Charlemagne. Therefore, Charlemagne did not inherit all of the vast land of the old Roman Empire. However, this was a very prestigious title befitting of the powerful ruler of much of western and central Europe.