

Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is having issues with his good friend, Britain's King Henry II.

It is the 12th century, and Becket is proving he is not a push-over. He takes his role as Archbishop very seriously, doing all he can to protect the Church's interests whenever disagreements erupt between the Church and the King.

This causes the King great displeasure, and it is straining their friendship.

Among other issues, Becket refuses to sign a document known as the "Constitutions of Clarendon."

Why does he refuse to sign this document? Because he believes this new law would—among other things—end up punishing clerics twice for the same crime. Becket is adamant in his refusal to agree to such a thing.

In 1164, Becket is found guilty of treason at the Great Council held in Northampton. Avoiding whatever adverse consequences might flow from this verdict, Becket flees to France.

Becket has the sitting Pope (Alexander III) on his side, however. The Pope threatens the King with excommunication from the Catholic Church, so Henry lets Becket come home to England.

At this stage of their quarrels, it seems that Becket has bested the King (who views Becket as a "troublesome priest").

In the presence of English Barons, Henry II—who is now utterly vexed by Becket's actions—cries out:

*Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?*

Believing the King meant for Becket to be murdered, four knights ride to Canterbury Cathedral and kill Becket on December 29, 1170. That scene is recreated in this film clip, starring Richard Burton (as Becket) and Peter O'Toole (as Henry II).

The British Library tells us what happened thereafter:

*The whole of Europe was shocked by the murder. Henry walked barefoot from London to Canterbury to show he was sorry . . .*

*After his death, Becket was made a saint, and Canterbury Cathedral became a shrine for pilgrims to visit.*

*The fact that so many people thought Becket was a saint affected the way they wrote about him after his death. Historians have found it hard to find accounts of the events of 1170 which are not in favour of Becket.*

Referred to as a saint, for nearly 900 years, Becket is still honored. He is also the subject of thirteenth-century stained-glass windows and modern film.

## Credits:

Clip from "Becket" (1964) - online, via YouTube. Copyright, Paramount Pictures, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the movie (which received 12 Academy Award nominations).

### Directed by

Peter Glenville

### Produced by

Hal B. Wallis

### Written by

Edward Anhalt (screenplay)

Jean Anouilh (play)

**Starring**

Richard Burton  
Peter O'Toole  
John Gielgud  
Donald Wolfitt  
Martita Hunt  
Pamela Brown  
Siân Phillips  
Paolo Stoppa

**Music by**

Laurence Rosenthal

**Cinematography**

Geoffrey Unsworth

**Editing by**

Anne V. Coates

**Distributed by** Paramount Pictures

**Release date** - United States March 11, 1964

**Running Time** - 148 minutes

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Murder-of-Thomas-Becket>

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**Media Stream****Canterbury Cathedral - Murder of Thomas Becket**

Image online, courtesy canterbury-cathedral.org website.

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