

Power, Religion, and War in the Middle Ages

The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages

The Catholic Church, or the Church as it is often referred to, was very influential in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. The Church and its teachings provided many people with security and order. It also provided a structure for the **clergy**, or bishops and priests, within the Church. As you have learned, the **pope** is the head of the Roman Catholic Church and lives in Rome. Beneath the Pope in the hierarchy or structure of the Church are the **Bishops**, and then the **priests**. Priests tended to be most people's contact with the Church in the Middle Ages as priests were the one who were living near and maintaining village churches.

The Church was also very influential in education in the Middle Ages. Monasteries and convents offered the best educational communities in Europe during this time. To improve their lives and show their devotion to their God, many men entered **monasteries**, or religious communities where men gave up all of their possessions and devoted their lives to serving God. The men who lived in these communities were called **monks**. Women would join **convents** for the same reasons. Monasteries and convents did things like **opened schools, maintained libraries, and copied books**. These actions meant that monasteries and convents were the only places in Western Europe that were **preserving the legacy of Rome**. In addition, often times the village priest would be the only person in the community who was **literate**.

The Church was also very powerful in the affairs of the government during the Middle Ages. Think about the separation of church and state that is a fundamental aspect of our Constitution. The exact opposite was occurring in Europe during this time period. Frequently, the Church would ask governments in Europe to make certain decisions and the governments would obey. The Church had many tools to persuade rulers to do as the Church wanted. One of these tools was called excommunication. The Church could tell a ruler that he or she would be kicked out of the church, or **excommunicated**, if they did not follow the will of the Church in their government. If a person was excommunicated, they feared that they would have no chance at salvation, or going to heaven, when they died. The Church also had the power of **interdiction**—or the ability to tell a ruler that no church services would be able to be performed in their kingdom if he or she did not do what the Church asked. This would turn the people of the kingdom against the king, as people of this time felt that church services were crucial to their salvation; and many peasants depended on the welfare of the church to survive.

If the Church had power in the governments in Western Europe, Kings also had great power within the Church as well. During the Middle Ages, lay investiture was very common. **Lay investiture** is the ability of kings and nobles to appoint Roman Catholic bishops. However, this practice was banned by Pope Gregory VIII in a document called the **Concordat of Worms** which was signed in 1122. This document ended lay investiture, but gave the Emperor the ability to veto the Church's election of a bishop within their kingdom.

The Crusades

The Crusades were a series of wars fought in the Middle Ages from 1096 to 1272. During this time, the pope began many European military expeditions to the Holy Land (especially the city of Jerusalem). This was because Jerusalem came under the control of Muslim Turks. Before the Turks were in control, anyone could visit important religious sites. However, once the sites were under Muslim control, Christians were unable to make pilgrimages. As a result, the Crusades were fought for **control of and rights to visit the Holy Land**.

The first Crusade occurred when **Pope Urban II** called upon the knights of Europe to defeat the Turks. Pope Urban also saw the Crusades as a way to get feudal lords to fight together against a common enemy, instead of fighting against one another as they often did. He also believed that military expeditions under his direction would increase the power and influence of the Catholic Church. **Feudal lords** had several reasons for supporting the Crusades. Many felt it was their religious duty to support the wishes of the pope. Many hoped to gain land and wealth by defeating the Turks. Others went for adventure and the chance to become heroes. **Merchants**—especially those in the Italian port cities of Venice and Genoa—also believed that the Crusades could benefit them as well. Many merchants provided ships for the voyages and believed that expeditions to the Near East would lead to an increase of trade with that part of the world.

In the First Crusade, from 1096-1099, preachers, such as **Peter the Hermit**, traveled through the countryside convincing peasants to leave for the Holy Land. Peter the Hermit was untrained in military skill and therefore led an army lacking training and proper military equipment. On this Crusade, many starved to death, and many more were killed by the Muslim Turks. As a result, this peasant army never reached Jerusalem. Later, an expedition of knights reached the Holy Land and **captured Jerusalem**, bringing it back under Christian control.

In the **Second Crusade**, from 1147-1149, the King of France and the emperor of Germany led armies that were defeated by the Muslim Turks who won back some of their lost territory. The **Third Crusade** (1189-1192) began when Jerusalem fell back into the territory of the Muslim Turks. **Richard the Lionhearted**, King of England at the time, led the Crusaders who developed a **truce** with the Muslim Turks where the land in and around Jerusalem would remain under Muslim Turk control, but Christians would be **allowed to visit**.

During the 1200's many more expeditions were organized, but all were unsuccessful. One of these expeditions was called the **Children's Crusade**. In this Crusade, two armies of children—one from France and one from Germany, were led by a boy named **Stephen** who believed God wanted him to take an army to the Holy Land. This "army" consisted of 30,000 young boys and girls—many of them under the age of twelve. None of these boys and girls reached the Holy Land, and few returned home safely as many died from starvation, cold weather, exhaustion and drowning.

The Crusades had a strong **impact** on World History. While the Holy Land and Jerusalem remained under **Muslim Turk** control, Europeans learned how to **build better ships and draw better maps**; which later assisted in European exploration of the world. **Trade and travel** also increased with many goods from Southwest Asia making their way to Europe. With more goods from other parts of the world, **businesses expanded** as well. Crusaders who had returned to Europe also wanted to return to the areas they had been in to travel. Because of strong royal leadership, the Crusades also **increased the power of the King, and weakened the power of feudal lords**. The power of feudal lords also declined due to the death of many lords in battle and the expense of supplies and equipment. Unfortunately, this time period also marked the **beginning of bad feelings between Muslims and Christians**.

As you just read, the Crusades increased the power of the King. In England, this power continued to increase until **King John** signed the **Magna Carta** in 1215. This document guaranteed basic political rights for the people of England. Some of the **rights** that are contained in this document are: no taxation without representation, trial by jury, and protection under the law for English citizens. By signing the Magna Carta, a document that **limits the power of the monarchy**, King John illustrated that even Kings are not above the law in England.

Bubonic Plague

1. When did it happen?
2. What else is it called?
3. What was it?
4. Where did it come from?
5. How many people died?
6. What did people in the Middle Ages think caused the Plague, and how did they try to prevent it?
7. What are its symptoms, and how does it affect the infected person?

8. How did the Doctors of the Middle Ages try to treat an infected person since they didn't know about antibiotics?

9. How did the Plague affect The Catholic Church?

10. How did the Plague affect The Feudal System:

11. How did the Plague affect The Economy:

12. How did the Plague affect The Society of the Middle Ages?