

The Role of the Church in the Middle Ages

E.Q. How did the Roman Catholic Church use its power to influence all classes within the feudal system of Europe?

Within the chaos and disorder of the fall of Rome, one institution remained constant and provided stability for the people of Europe. This was the Roman Catholic Church. Except for Muslims in Spain and groups of Jews, everyone in Western Europe was a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

For peasants and nobles alike, the Church offered a chance at salvation and eternal life. This was important because life was hard during the Middle Ages and salvation gave people something to look forward to in their next life. The path to salvation within the Church included the sacraments. These are the seven sacred rites that were given by the Church and included baptism and Holy Communion.

What did the Church offer to the people of the Middle Ages? _____

How did the people obtain this gift? _____

Power of the Church

- The pope was the spiritual and political head of the Church. He had great power. He had the power to remove kings from the throne.
- Church officials were educated. Kings and nobles sought them out as advisers. As a result, the Church was able to influence many decisions made by kings and nobles.
- The Church made laws and set up courts.
- The Church collected taxes from all classes in the feudal system.
- The Church owned land. It would allow lords to use the land if the lord and all others on the land promised to live life as a Christian. Many lords forced their serfs to become Christians so that they could use the land.
- One of the most powerful tools of the Church was the power of **excommunication**. This means that a person no longer is allowed to take part in Church activities including the sacraments. This was a threat the Church used to keep kings and lords under the Church's control.

Group	How did the Church influence this group? Was this a positive (+) or negative (-) influence?
King	
Noble/Lord	
Serf	

Control of Learning:

- Only schools were set up by the church to train young men for service to the Church.
- **Monasteries**, places where monks practiced a life of prayer and worship, were opened across Western Europe.
- Monks would also copy by hand ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts.
- The Church kept the manuscripts locked away from the rest of the population. Only those in the Church were given access to them.

In what ways did the Church have control over the learning that took place in the Middle Ages?

Why would the Church want to keep manuscripts away from the people? _____

Religion and the Arts:

- During the Middle Ages, all artistic and cultural expressions reflected the values of the Church.
- Medieval churches were decorated with statues, paintings, and stained glass windows. These works of art made churches more beautiful and helped teach Bible stories and Christian beliefs to people who could not read or write.
- Cities competed to build the tallest and most beautiful cathedrals. The steeples, which soared towards heaven, were created to remind worshippers of the power of God.

What does the art of the Middle Ages reflect about the values of the people? _____
