

# The Effects of Feudalism

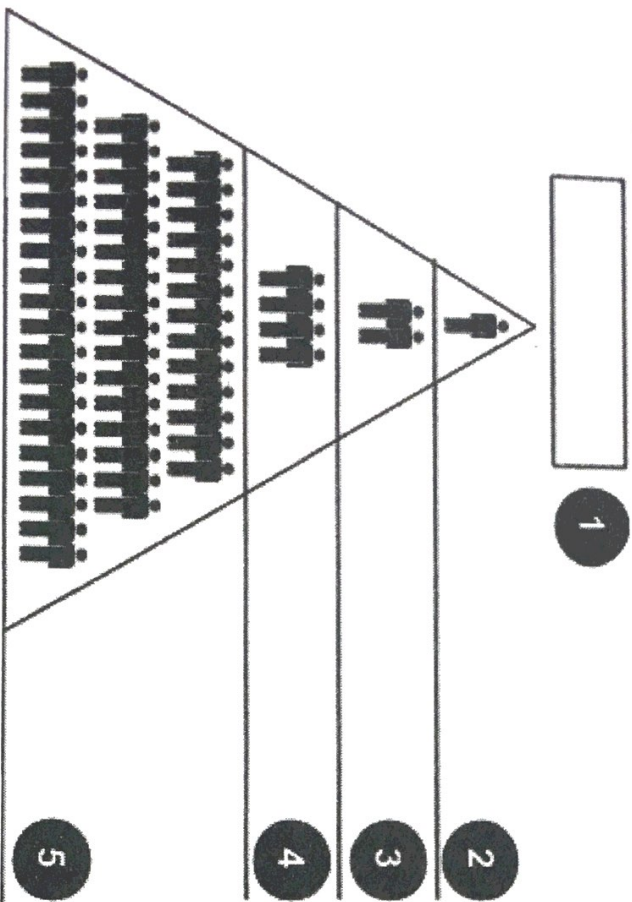
Everyone had a well-defined place in medieval society. People were born into their social positions, and there was little chance of moving beyond them.

Therefore, this was a society built around \_\_\_\_\_ (social mobility OR a rigid social structure).

→ Directions: Using the text to your right, place the following social classes in the correct ranking on the social pyramid.

## Social Classes:

- Serfs and Peasants
- Kings (Monarchs)
- Roman Catholic Church/Pope
- Knights and Vassals
- Lords



**Serfs and Peasants:** Most peasants on a manor were serfs, bound to the land. Serfs were not slaves who could be bought and sold. Still, they were not free. They could not leave the manor without the lord's permission. If the manor was granted to a new lord, the serfs went along with it.

**Kings (Monarchs):**  
The king owned all the land and allowed the trusted nobles to govern a part of the land in return for other services.

**Roman Catholic Church/Pope:** In the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church carved out a unique position in Western Europe. It not only controlled the spiritual life of Christians but gradually became the most powerful secular, or non-religious, force in medieval Europe.

During the Middle Ages, the pope was the spiritual leader of the Western Christian Church, based in Rome. Declaring themselves representatives of God on Earth, medieval popes eventually claimed **papal supremacy**, or authority over all secular rulers, including kings and emperors.

The Church developed their own body of laws, known as **canon law**, as well as its own courts. [...] Anyone who disobeyed Church law faced a range of penalties. The most severe and terrifying was **excommunication**. Those who were excommunicated could not receive the sacraments or a Christian burial, which condemned them to hell for eternity.

**Knights and Vassals:**  
For medieval nobles, warfare was a way of life. Rival lords battled constantly for power. Many nobles began training in boyhood for a future occupation as a **knight**, or mounted warrior. In the later Middle Ages, knights adopted a code of conduct called **chivalry**.

**Nobility (Lords):** Below the monarchs were powerful lords such as dukes and counts who held the largest fiefs. Each of these lords had vassals.

# Thinking Critically about Social Hierarchy

→ Directions: Based on what you learned in this lesson and previous units, respond to the questions below.

| Questions   | Responses             |
|---|-----------------------|
| <p>1a. Which social class had the greatest amount of power in feudal Europe?</p> <p>1b. What specific powers did this class have?</p>   | <p>1a.</p> <p>1b.</p> |
| <p>2a. Which class of people made up the bulk of the medieval population?</p> <p>2b. If you were a serf, what would be your opinion of the feudal system? Why?</p>  | <p>2a.</p> <p>2b.</p> |
| <div data-bbox="989 1491 1452 1974" data-label="Diagram"> </div> <p>3a. What are the similarities between the feudal social structure and the Hindu caste system?</p> <p>3b. What are the differences between the feudal social structure and the Hindu caste system?</p> | <p>3a.</p> <p>3b.</p> |



**CHAPTER 13**

**GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: PLACE**  
*Feudal Europe's Religious Influences*

**Section 4**

Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the map carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

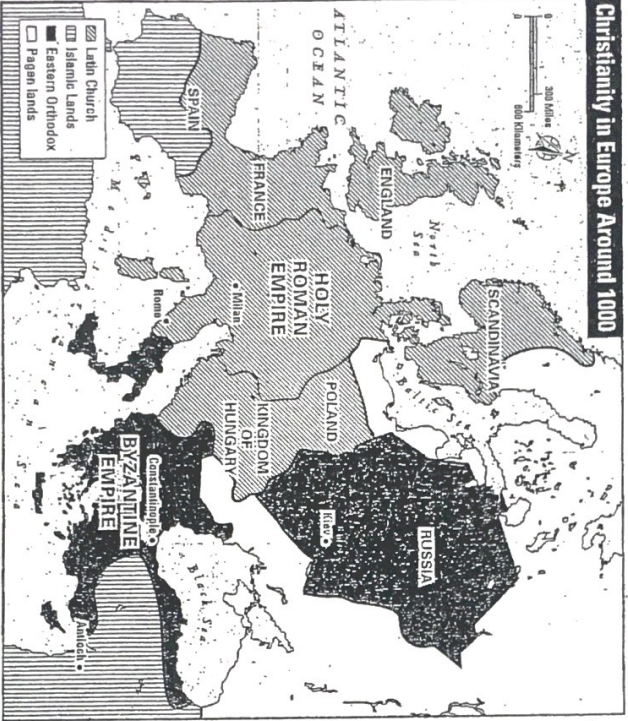
The influence of the Latin Church—the Roman Catholic Church—grew in western Europe after 800. By 1000, at the end of the age of invasions, the Church's vision of a spiritual kingdom in feudal Europe was nearly realized.

A sign of the spread of Roman Christianity in western Europe was the increased presence of churches. The population of the continent was increasing rapidly—from around 14 million in 600 to 22 million in 950—and the need to accommodate all the new faithful caused a boom in religious buildings. It was an era of new Roman Christian states. By 966 much of the Polish region had sided with Rome.

as did that of Hungary around 986. Large sections of Scandinavia adopted the Latin Church by 1000. In the fifth century, Ireland became the "island of saints." Then, between 500 and 900, Ireland helped bring England under the influence of Roman Christianity.

However, in 988, in far eastern Europe, the prince of Kiev received baptism from the Eastern Orthodox, or Byzantine, Church, as regions to the south had done in the eighth century. Disputes between the two wings of Christianity—headed by Constantinople and Rome—would soon separate the two forever.

**Christianity in Europe Around 1000**



**Interpreting Text and Visuals**

1. What two forms of Christianity were found in Europe in 1000? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What surrounds most of the northern section of Eastern Orthodox lands? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which cities were the leaders of the two Christian religions? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What was the main religion of southern Spain? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What nine full or partial political divisions made up the Latin Church around 1000? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What areas of the Latin Church were bordered by pagan lands? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What body of water touched Latin, Eastern Orthodox, and pagan lands? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Look carefully at the map. In what place would you anticipate a major effort by the Latin Church to expand its influence? Why? \_\_\_\_\_



PRIMARY SOURCE **The Duties of Lords and Vassals**  
Letter from Bishop Fulbert

*In the year 1020, Bishop Fulbert of Chartres wrote this letter to William, Duke of Aquitaine, in southern France. The letter is the earliest surviving document explaining the bond between lords and vassals. As you read, think about how lords and vassals were supposed to act toward one another.*

To William, most illustrious duke of the Aquitanians, Bishop Fulbert, the favor of his prayers:

Requested to write something regarding the character of fealty, I have set down briefly for you, on the authority of the books, the following things. He who takes the oath of fealty [faithfulness] to his lord ought always to keep in mind these six things: what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, and practicable. Harmless, which means that he ought not to injure his lord in his body; safe, that he should not injure him by betraying his confidence or the defenses upon which he depends for security; honorable, that he should not injure him in his justice, or in other matters that relate to his honor; useful, that he should not injure him in his property; easy, that he should not make difficult that which his lord can do easily; and practicable, that he should not make impossible for the lord that which is possible.

However, while it is proper that the faithful vassal avoid these injuries, it is not for doing this alone that he deserves his holding: for it is not enough to refrain from wrongdoing, unless that which is good is done also. It remains, therefore, that in the same six things referred to above he should faithfully advise and aid his lord, if he wishes to be regarded as worthy of his benefice and to be safe concerning the fealty which he has sworn.

The lord also ought to act toward his faithful vassal in the same manner in all these things. And if he fails to do this, he will be rightfully regarded as guilty of bad faith, just as the former, if he should be found shirking, or willing to shirk, his obligations would be perfidious [treacherous] and perjured.

I should have written to you at greater length had I not been busy with many other matters, including the rebuilding of our city and church, which were recently completely destroyed by a terrible fire. Though for a time we could not think of anything but this disaster, yet now, by the hope of God's comfort, and of yours also, we breathe more freely again.

*from F.A. Ogg, ed., A Source Book of Medieval History (New York: American Book Company, 1907), 220–221. Reprinted in David Herlihy, ed., The History of Feudalism (New York: Walker and Company, 1970), 97.*

## Discussion Questions

### Determining Main Ideas

1. What were the six things that a faithful vassal should have always kept in mind?
2. What was a vassal expected to do besides avoid injurious behavior?
3. **Making Inferences** According to this letter, what formed the basis of the bond between a lord and his vassals?