

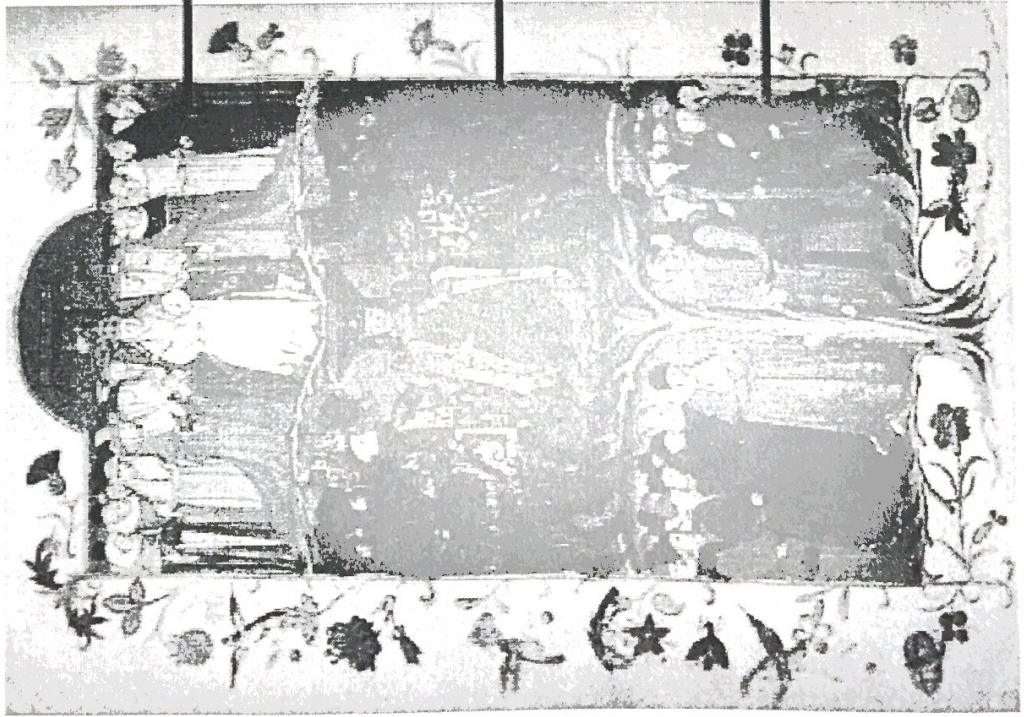


## Document Analysis Activity: Was the Catholic Church powerful in Medieval Europe?

→ Directions: Examine each of the following documents, then respond to the accompanying prompts to determine if the evidence supports that the Catholic Church was or was not powerful in Medieval Europe.

Corroborate

### Document 1



#### The Clergy

The pope and the clergy, people with positions in the Catholic Church like priests, nuns, monks, bishops, cardinals, and archbishops, are pictured here.

#### Monarchy and Nobility

Kings, queens, nobles, and knights are pictured here.

#### Peasants

Pictured here are the peasants, artisans, merchants, and serfs who lived in Medieval communities but were not ordained with positions in the Catholic Church.

1a. Circle which claim this document supports.

Claim A: The Catholic Church was very powerful in Medieval Europe.

Claim B: The Catholic Church was not very powerful in Medieval Europe.

1b. Identify a piece of textual or visual evidence from this document that supports the claim this document makes.

A painting depicting the three "estates" or classes in Medieval France.

Image is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain.

## Document 2



Watch this excerpt of the Crash Course World History video "Luther and the Protestant Reformation" (01:28-02:35)

### Transcript:

During the European Middle Ages, the Catholic Church really dominated European civilization. It's almost impossible to imagine the scope of the Church's power in the Middle Ages, but let's try.

First off, the Catholic Church was the caretaker of the most important thing that Christians had, their souls, which, unlike our temporal [secular] bodies, were eternal. And then there was the parish priest, who played a pivotal role throughout every person's life, baptizing them, marrying them, hearing their confessions, [and] providing last rites.

The church also provided all of the social services: It distributed alms [money or food given as a donation] to the poor, and ran orphanages, and provided what education was available. Most Europeans would in their lives meet exactly one person who could read the Bible, which was only available in Latin - their parish priest.

And, the church owned over 1/3 of all the land in Europe, which helped make it the most powerful economic and political force on the continent.

And the Pope claimed authority over all the kings of Europe, as the successor to the Roman Emperor. So this was a very powerful institution...

2a. Circle which claim this document supports.

Claim A: The Catholic Church was very powerful in Medieval Europe.

Claim B: The Catholic Church was not very powerful in Medieval Europe.

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2b. Identify a piece of textual or visual evidence from this document that supports the claim this document makes.



### Document 3: *Dictatus papae*

Pope Gregory was elected pope in 1073 CE. He believed that as pope, he was God's "vicar [representative] on earth" and that his authority extended over religious life and secular political life. In 1075, he issued a decree forbidding a practice called lay investiture. Lay investiture was a practice whereby secular rulers like emperors or kings could select leaders of the church. Pope Gregory felt that this practice reduced his power so he ended it. This angered many kings and emperors. *Dictatus papae* is a compilation of 27 statements about the powers of the pope. It was included in Pope Gregory VII's register under the year 1075. *Dictatus papae* reflects the views of Pope Gregory about the power of popes.

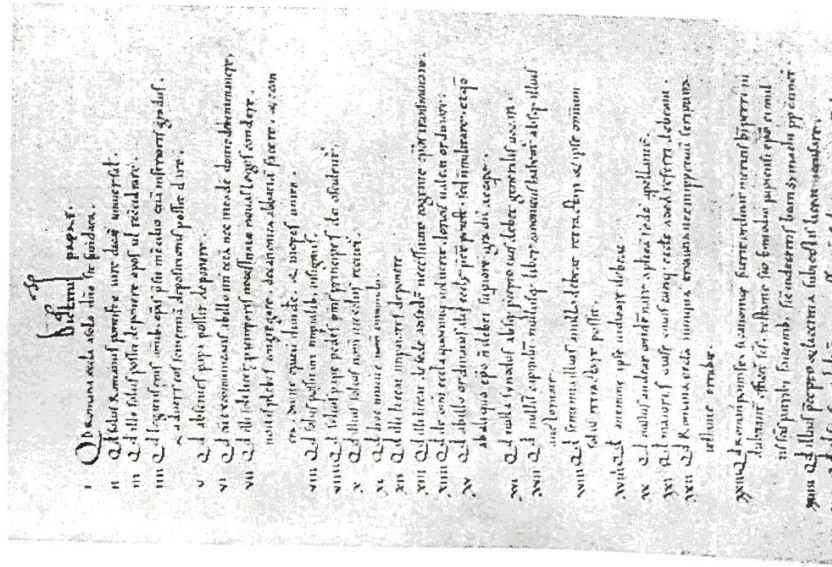


Image is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain.

3a. Circle which claim this document supports.

Claim A: The Catholic Church was very powerful in Medieval Europe.

Claim B: The Catholic Church was not very powerful in Medieval Europe.

3b. Identify a piece of textual or visual evidence from this document that supports the claim this document makes.

#### Excerpts from *Dictatus Papae*:

9. That of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet.
12. That it may be permitted to him [pope] to depose [remove from power] emperors.
14. That he has power to ordain [make someone a priest] a clerk of any church he may wish.
17. That no chapter and no book shall be considered canonical [included in a list of sacred books] without his authority.
18. That a sentence passed by him may be retracted by no one; and that he himself, alone of all, may retract it.
19. That he himself may be judged by no one.

Excerpt is from Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages which is published on the Internet Medieval Sourcebook.



## Document 4: Canon Law, Excommunication, and Interdict



Painting of Pope Innocent III, 1219.  
Image is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain.

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church developed its own set of laws called **canon law**. Medieval canon law was based on the Bible and decision made by the clergy as well as local laws and Roman law also influenced canon law.

Canon law set out the rules that Catholics needed to follow and included topics like religious teachings accepted by the church, crimes, the role of the clergy, and marriage.

Depending on the situation, breaking canon law could result in **excommunication**, the limiting or ending of a person's membership in the Catholic Church. Those who were excommunicated could not receive the sacraments [sacred ceremonies of the church] or a Christian burial, which many believed could condemn them to hell for eternity.

Popes and other clergy members in the Church used excommunication to punish those who opposed them. If the Church wanted to send a message to a noble or king who disagreed with them or spoke out against them he could impose an interdict, an order that excluded a whole region from receiving holy sacraments in the Catholic Church. In some cases, this led to revolts from the people who feared their souls were in danger which might lead to the Church getting what they wanted. A powerful noble who opposed the Church might face an interdict, but even the strongest ruler usually gave in rather than have to deal with revolts by the common people.

Adapted by New Visions from *Excommunication* on New World Encyclopedia which is published under the [CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) license.

4a. Circle which claim this document supports.

Claim A: The Catholic Church was very powerful in Medieval Europe.

Claim B: The Catholic Church was not very powerful in Medieval Europe.

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4b. Identify a piece of textual or visual evidence from this document that supports the claim this document makes.