

# The Church



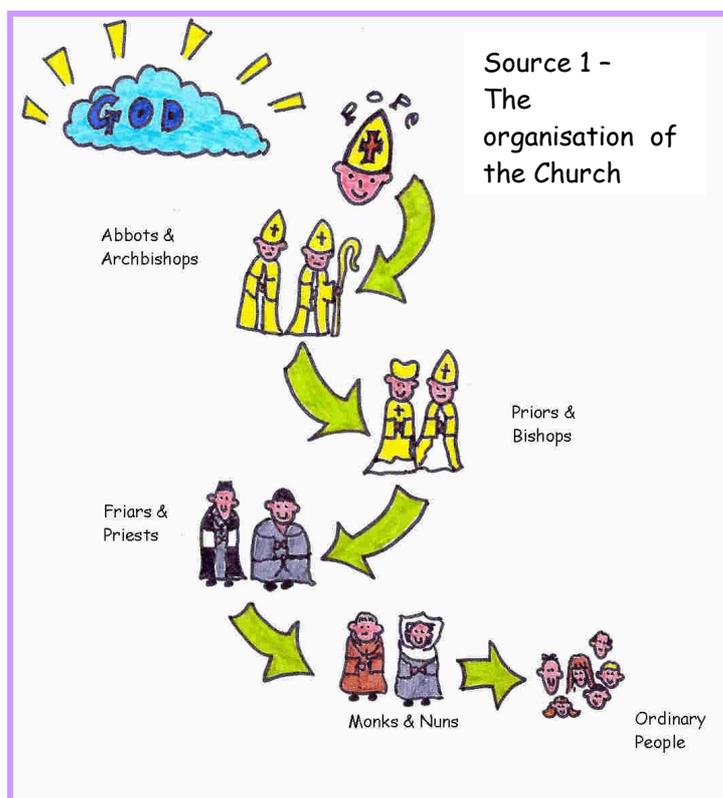
Today, only a small percentage of the population go to church every Sunday, but in the Middle Ages, everyone was religious. The Church was the centre of their lives.

The biggest building in a town or village was the church. It was a **Catholic** church because in the Middle Ages the Catholic religion was the only one.

All men and women believed in Heaven and Hell. Rich people would even leave their land and money to the Church, hoping it would get them into Heaven.

## How was the Church Organised?

The Catholic Church wanted everyone in **Christendom** to be taught the same things about God and religion. The Church was able to do this because of the way it was organised. Have a look at source 1 below.



## Keywords

**Catholic** - the only religion in Medieval England.

**priest** - man in charge of religious ceremonies in a village or parish.

**Doom painting** - picture to show people what Heaven and Hell were like.

**Latin** - language used in Catholic services.

**Christendom** - all the countries where Christianity was the main religion.

At the head of the Church was the Pope, in Rome.

Under him were all the Bishops and Archbishops in Christendom, including England.

Under the bishops and Archbishops, came the parish **priests**. They had everyday contact with the ordinary people. This organisation made the Church very powerful.

As well as being able to influence peoples' minds, the Church owned land and money in Christendom.

Many important positions in government were held by Bishops and Archbishops. This sometimes led to great problems. Some churchmen had to choose between loyalty to their King and loyalty to the Pope in Rome.

## Why were parish priests so important?

Village and parish priests were simple men, but they had very important jobs. After the Lord of the Manor, the priest was the most important man in the village. On Sundays, during mass, he would tell people all about Heaven and Hell. Because services were in **Latin**, many ordinary folk could not understand them. Statues and '**Doom Paintings**' were used to explain to people the horrors of Hell and the joys of Heaven. Look at the doom painting below. What things can you see going on?



Source 2 - A Doom Painting

Not only did parish priests say Sunday mass, they were also responsible for other day to day jobs in the village. Source 3 shows the duties of a parish priest.

The Parish Priest will:

- Say mass in the village church (and say it in Latin).
- Perform weddings and baptisms.
- Hear confessions.
- Visit villagers regularly and listen to their problems.
- Bury the dead.
- Heal the sick.
- Teach children of wealthy families to read and write.
- Work the land, growing crops in the church grounds.
- Make sure everyone pays their tithe.
- Keep village records.



Source 3 - Priestly duties.

# Questions

Answer in  
full  
sentences!

1) In your book, write out the following KEYWORDS and their meanings.

- Catholic
- Priest
- Doom Painting
- Latin
- Christendom

2) Copy and complete these few sentences.

In the middle ages, the only religion was the \_\_\_\_\_ religion. Everybody went to church. The services were in \_\_\_\_\_ but there were statues and \_\_\_\_\_ to help ordinary people understand.

3) Look at source 1. Draw a similar diagram in your book showing the organisation of the church.

4) Write a paragraph to explain how the church was organised. Use the following words in your paragraph. **Pope, Archbishops, Bishops, Parish priests, Ordinary people.**

5) You read that the church was powerful. What made it powerful?

6) What were Doom Paintings and why were they used?

7) Draw your own Doom Painting. Try not to copy the one shown in source 2. Remember that your picture should show scenes from Heaven and Hell.

8) Look at source 3. Write a short paragraph explaining what priests were expected to do in a village.

9) Some of the jobs done by parish priests in the middle ages are done by someone else today. Find four of them. For each, write down the job, who did it in the middle ages, and who does it today. E.g. **Healing the sick - in the middle ages, this job was done by the parish priest. Today, it is done by doctors.**

## PSSSST! Bonus question!

Why were the church, and parish priests important to ordinary people in the middle ages?  
You can include pictures in this extended answer if you want to.

