

L E S S O N 1

The Power of the Church

THINKING FOCUS

What aspects of European society did the church dominate from 1100 to 1300?

Key Terms

- clergy
- excommunication
- salvation
- tithe
- university

► *This painting shows the building of Chartres Cathedral. The cathedral was so important to the people that even noblemen and their ladies helped haul stones.*

Many townspeople stood on the church steps awaiting the decision about the new cathedral. This decision would affect their town's future. At last the smiling bishop appeared at the doorway to announce the long awaited answer. Yes, a cathedral would be built in their town to the glory of God!

An architect was selected to design the cathedral and supervise the beginning of its construction. The expense would be great since many workers would be needed: stonecutters, woodworkers,

carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, roofers, glassmakers, sculptors, and more. For hundreds of men in the town this would become their life's work. For a few it would even mean their death, since there was the possibility of falling from the scaffolding on which the workers stood as they built the walls ever higher.

The townspeople knew it could take as many as 100 years to complete the building of the cathedral. However, it was difficult for them to imagine that their great-great-grandchildren would be as old as they were now when the building was finished.

Why would these people, who lived in western Europe in A.D. 1200, spend so much money, time, and labor to begin building something that they would not even live to see completed? Because the cathedral allowed them to celebrate, in stone and glass, the power of the church and of God in their lives.



A Powerful Church in Europe

Between 800 and 1300 almost all the people of Europe were Christians. Only one branch of the faith existed in Europe, and it was headed by the pope in Rome. The Christian religion was organized in such a way that it was the center of spiritual life and an important political force.

The Church Hierarchy

The church was organized in a hierarchy so that each member of the **clergy**, or ordained members of the church, had a specific rank. The priest of the local church, or parish, had a certain group of duties. These included leading religious services, visiting the sick, and conducting ceremonies such as baptisms and weddings. Many parishes together formed one diocese (*DY uh sihs*). Heading each diocese was a bishop, who, in turn, had a different group of responsibilities.

The dioceses were united into provinces, or archdioceses, under the authority of archbishops. Cardinals, who were second in power only to the pope himself, oversaw the archbishops. The cardinals also acted as counselors to the pope and were responsible for electing new popes. Leading the entire church was the pope. *Pope* comes from the Latin word for "father."

The Church's Influence

The church encouraged Christians to help save their souls by giving donations to the churches of Europe. This brought in much money for the churches. In addition, popes, cardinals, and bishops were often nobles with land of their own who left this land to the church when they died. By 1050, the church was the largest landholder in western Europe.

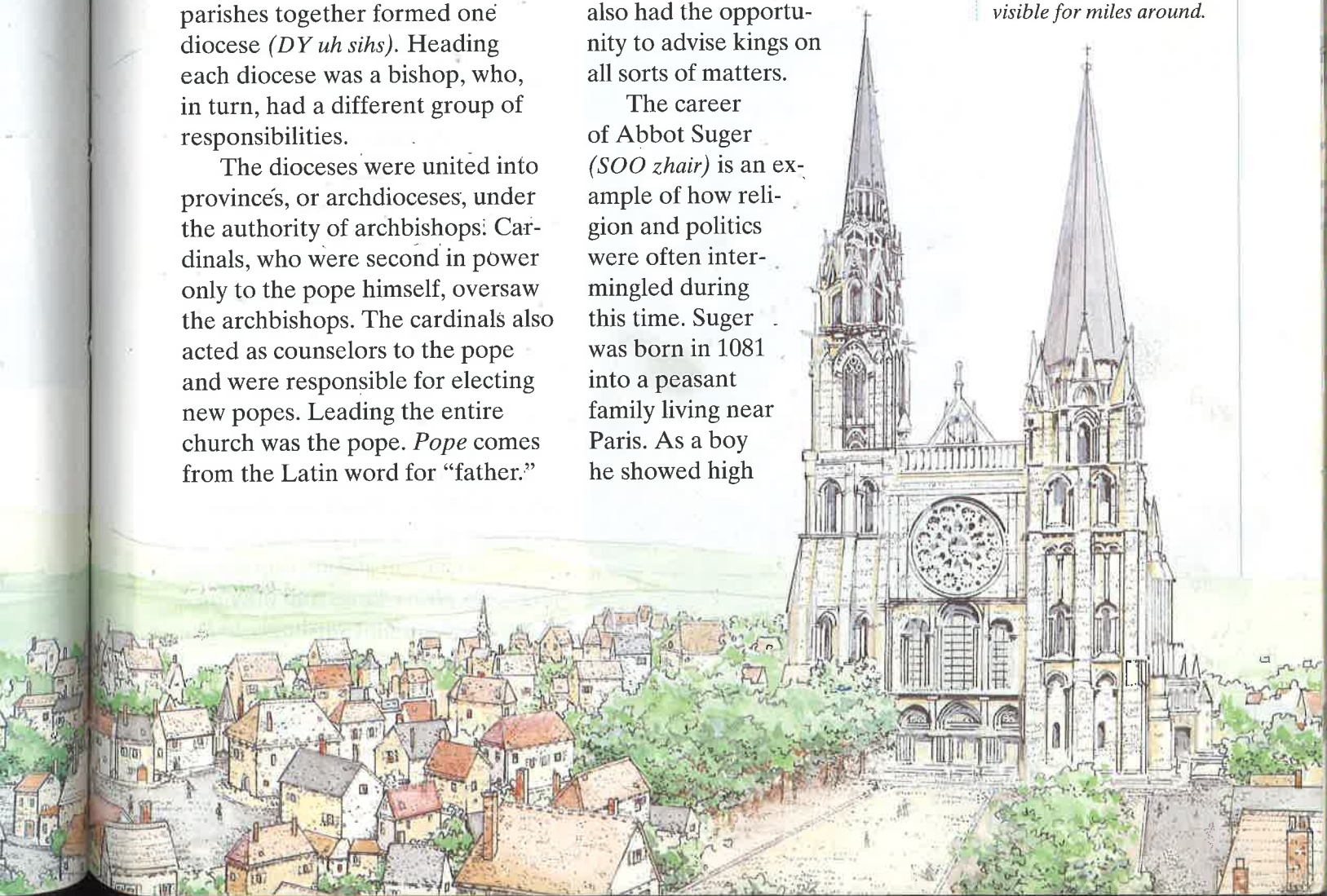
In addition to possessing large amounts of land and wealth, the church had another advantage. The clergy were often the only members of society who could read and write. Even most kings were illiterate, so they needed bishops, abbots, and clerks to write documents and keep records. Thus the clergy also had the opportunity to advise kings on all sorts of matters.

The career of Abbot Suger (*SOO zhair*) is an example of how religion and politics were often intermingled during this time. Suger was born in 1081 into a peasant family living near Paris. As a boy he showed high



▲ Popes wear miters with peaks in front and back. • Miters developed from tiaras like the one shown on page 284.

▼ The spires of the famous Chartres Cathedral, built on a hill 50 miles southwest of Paris, are visible for miles around.



intelligence and was selected by his village priest to be educated in a monastery, where his closest friend happened to be the son of the king of France. In 1108, that friend was crowned King Louis VI of France.

Suger became a monk and, in 1122, an abbot, or leader of his monastery. As Louis's friend and adviser, he worked to increase the cooperation between Louis and his nobles by stressing the fact that they shared a common faith. When King Henry of Germany invaded King Louis's lands in 1124, Abbot

Suger loaned the king the sacred banner from the monastery to carry into battle. The banner rallied so many French nobles to the king that Henry retreated before the battle began.

From 1147 to 1149, the new king, the son of Louis VI, left his crown with Abbot Suger and appointed him regent to rule his lands while he, the king, was away at war. During these years, Suger developed fairer methods of taxation and prevented a rebellion from taking away Louis's rule. ■

■ Describe the hierarchy of the church.

A Power Struggle Between Kings and Popes

Kings and nobles had gained the power to appoint bishops and other officials of the church during the 800s. They sometimes even sold these positions to the highest

bidder. In particular, kings rewarded their allies by appointing them to be bishops of the church. The fact that the kings possessed such great power over the church strengthened their authority.

Yet, because these church officials appointed by the kings often behaved immorally and quite selfishly, many people lost respect for the church.

► Pope Gregory, wearing a jeweled tiara, is adored by two cherubs, or childlike angels. The jewel-encrusted gold cross reveals the wealth possessed by the church.



Pope Gregory VII

One monk, named Hildebrand, was part of a reform movement to free the church from the control of kings and nobles. He wanted the church to be free of this control so that the clergy might concentrate on performing its mission of saving Christians. Hildebrand became pope in 1073 and took the name Gregory VII. In 1075, Gregory issued a document stating that the pope was above kings and only the pope could appoint cardinals and bishops. The document warned that government officials who did not obey the pope could be removed from office.

King Henry IV

Henry IV, king of Germany and Italy, considered Gregory's document an attack on his power as king. So, while continuing to appoint bishops in his kingdom, Henry fired back a letter to the pope. In it the king demanded that the pope step down from his office.

But Gregory would do no such thing. Instead, in 1076, he announced the **excommunication** of Henry, thus expelling Henry from the church. Henry was condemned to live as an outcast from the church-oriented society of the 1000s. The excommunication also meant that Henry's subjects were no longer obliged to obey him as their king.

Henry looked for support from his nobles and bishops but found little, because Gregory had also threatened them with excommunication if they supported the king. To save his throne, Henry realized he had to give in to the pope. He then traveled to Italy barefoot during the winter to present himself to the pope as a humble beggar. Gregory kept Henry waiting for three days in the snow outside his



castle before finally canceling the excommunication.

The Treaty

Pope Gregory had won this battle, but the struggle between the kings of Germany and the popes continued until 1122. In that year, church leaders, nobles, and representatives of the king and the pope met in Worms, Germany, where they agreed to a treaty called the Concordat (*kuhn KAWR dat*) of Worms. The king agreed to having the pope select church leaders. ■

◀ Henry IV wears a crown and holds the scepter and the orb and cross, symbols of monarchy. The orb and cross theme is repeated on the top of the crown.



■ Why is the conflict between Henry IV and Pope Gregory significant?

The Age of Faith

While popes and kings fought for power, the common people of western Europe tried to live their lives according to the principles of the church. The mission of the church was to save the soul of all members so that they would go to heaven after they died rather than hell. This **salvation**, or saving, came through accepting the beliefs of the church, living a moral life, and performing good works.

People also paid one-tenth of the produce from their lands to the church each year. This **tithe** (*tyth*) could be paid in money, produce, or labor. People also had to pay rent to the lord on whose land they farmed.

Daily Life

The church was the center of daily life in every village and town. Church bells announced the time



▲ *People are admitted into the church through baptism.*

► *During daily mass, the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples is remembered.*



▲ *The Catholic church teaches that marriage is the formal union of man and woman as husband and wife in the sight of God. In the 1000s, people married as early as the age of 13.*

► *At burial ceremonies a priest offered a blessing for the dead and welcomed the soul into heaven.*



for work, meals, rest, and for mass, the worship service. Churches were also centers of community activity. Often large and sturdily constructed, they served as gathering places for town meetings and as places of refuge during wars or heavy storms. The doorsteps or courtyard of a church might even be where the local farmers' market took place.

Church holidays provided the peasants with relief from their sunup-to-sundown farm labors. On these special days, Christians celebrated events in the life of Jesus and remembered famous saints of the church. After attending mass, the people spent the remainder of the holiday visiting, feasting, and dancing in the church courtyard.

A shared faith gave the church members a sense of community, but it also kept those with different beliefs outside this community. For example, Christians did not accept Jews socially and often even persecuted them. Jews were also generally not allowed to participate in trade. Furthermore, although they received special protection from the pope and the king, Jews were required to pay a tax whenever the king demanded.

Religious Orders

Many people in the church wanted a religious life that was less secluded than that of monks living in a monastery. As a result, during the 1200s, several new orders, or religious communities, were formed. These new orders did not shut themselves off from the world as other monks and nuns did. Instead, they lived in the towns and worked to bring Christianity directly to the people.

One new order was founded in 1209 by Francis of Assisi. Francis was born in Italy in 1182, the son of a wealthy merchant. After a carefree youth, he spent a year battling a serious illness. During that time, he had a vision of Christ that changed him forever.

Francis disowned his father and rejected a large inheritance, making a vow instead to live his life in poverty as Jesus had done. Francis concentrated all his efforts on rebuilding churches and serving the poor. Many people were drawn to follow his simple way of life. A new religious order, now called the Franciscans, formed to follow his example.

Francis was also a talented poet and musician. This is one of his poems.

Be praised, my Lord, for all
your creatures.

In the first place for the blessed
Brother Sun, who gives us the
day and enlightens us
through you.

He is beautiful and radiant
with his great splendor.

St. Francis of Assisi, from "The
Canticle of Brother Sun," 1224

Universities

Until the 1100s, education had taken place within monasteries and bishops' cathedrals. There young men planning to enter the clergy were educated. As European towns grew during the 1100s, people began wanting to get better educated—often still at bishops' cathedrals. This enthusiasm for learning was partly sparked by the flow of knowledge from the Muslim world. The Muslims had important schools in cities such as Cordoba

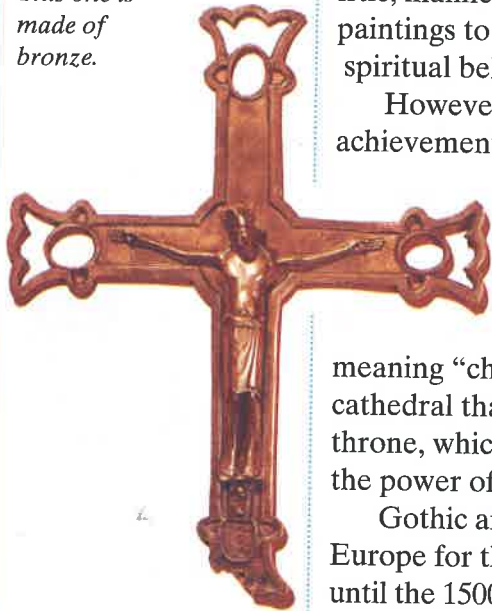


and Baghdad. Muslims and Jews had studied and translated writings of Greek philosophers, such as the works of Aristotle, which had been lost to Europe after the fall of Rome. Europeans learned about the Greek philosophers through Islamic writings and translations.

In Europe, groups of students gathered in towns to study philosophy, theology, medicine, and law under their favorite teachers. They began to form **universities**, or guilds of students and teachers. By the 1200s, universities had replaced monasteries and cathedrals as the popular centers of learning.

▲ *The peaceful landscape and gentle animals are symbols of Francis of Assisi's love for nature and all living things. The halo around Francis's head identifies him as a saint. Francis was declared a saint in 1228, two years after his death.*

► The floor plan of a Gothic cathedral is laid out in the shape of a cross. At the front of the cathedral is a crucifix. A crucifix is a cross with the figure of Jesus on it. This one is made of bronze.



Religious Art

In the painting and sculpture of this time, artists often vividly portrayed events in the life of Christ, such as the crucifixion. The artists also generally painted Christ in a highly stylized, as opposed to realistic, manner. Artists stylized their paintings to express their own spiritual beliefs.

However, the greatest artistic achievement of the age was the designing and building of Gothic cathedrals. The word *cathedral* comes from the Greek word meaning “chair.” It was in the cathedral that the bishop had his throne, which was the symbol of the power of his office.

Gothic architecture dominated Europe for the 400 years from 1140 until the 1500s. One of the innovations introduced by architects of these cathedrals was ribbed arches, which emphasized the shape of the pointed ceilings. Another was flying buttresses, which were used outside the cathedral to support the heavy structure. Look at the drawing of a flying buttress on page 504 in the Minipedia.

Gothic cathedrals were enormous buildings, generally the largest buildings in any community. Their vast interiors were designed to fill onlookers with awe at the



power of God. In these masterpieces of design and construction, a variety of artistic elements was combined. Among these were elements such as sculptures of Jesus and the saints; paintings that showed scenes from the life of Christ; and stained-glass windows, which looked like walls of colored light and usually illustrated stories from the Bible.

For believers, the cathedral, which had an interior of immense open spaces, religious images, and colored light, was the closest thing to experiencing heaven on earth. As Abbot Suger, a pioneer in the design of Gothic cathedrals, wrote of the cathedral of St. Denis, “The entire cathedral is pervaded [filled] by a wonderful and continuous light.” ■

■ How did the church influence European culture between the 1100s and 1300s?

R E V I E W

- 1. FOCUS** What aspects of European society did the church dominate from 1100 to 1300?
- 2. CONNECT** How does the hierarchy of the Catholic church compare to the feudal hierarchy of western Europe?
- 3. BELIEF SYSTEMS** What is excommunication? What role did it play in the struggle between popes and kings?
- 4. CRITICAL THINKING** Was Pope Gregory justified in excommunicating Henry? Explain.
- 5. WRITING ACTIVITY** Prepare a news story describing the building of a new Gothic cathedral in the late 1100s. Be sure to include quotations from at least three people who would be involved in building or using the church.