

Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Medieval Europe



"Life in the Middle Ages." : *Religious Orders*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_xeK_Vw4P-2M/TNGEYXWi1DI/AAAAAAAAAAc/G_Bs6-

[DsZs/s1600/ Catholic Roman Catholic Church Books History Church History Vatican Secrets - Hidden History Eucharist 2.gif](#)

After the Germanic barbarians, (Vandals, Angles, Saxons, Huns, and Visigoths), sacked Rome, Europe fell into a period of chaos and disorder. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church became the greatest source of **stability** (strength, security, safety) and **self-identification** (a feeling of belonging) in Western Europe for over 1,000 years, which for many people was the only source of hope in their lives. As a result, Christianity and the Catholic Church will play a major role in Europe during the Middle Ages.

The Center of Life

The local church was the center of town life. People attended weekly ceremonies. They were married, **confirmed** (ritual where person is made full member of church), and buried at the church. The church even confirmed kings on their throne giving them **divine right** (belief that God chose you to rule). The Catholic Church became very rich and powerful during the Middle Ages. People gave the church 1/10th of their earnings in **tithes** (payment). They also paid the church for various **sacraments** (religious ceremonies) such as baptism, marriage, and **communion** (bread and wine are consumed to show devotion to Jesus). People also paid **penances** (rituals to gain forgiveness for sins) to the church, called **indulgences**.

Question: Are there any similarities between churches in your community and the churches in the Middle Ages? If so, what?

In addition, the wealthy often gave the church land. Eventually, the church owned about one third of the land in Western Europe. Since the church was considered independent, they did not have to pay the king any tax for their land. Leaders of the church became rich and powerful. The leader of the Catholic Church was the **Pope**. Right below the pope were

powerful men called cardinals. Next were bishops and abbots. Even bishops held a lot of power on the local level and often served on the council of the king.



Shown left:
picture of pope
from Middle Ages

Shown right:
picture of current
pope, Pope
Francis



"Pope Francis, in Inaugural Homily, Pledges to Protect Church, Human Dignity." *The Michigan Catholic*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014

Monasteries



During the early Middle Ages, the Catholic Church built **monasteries** (place where monks live and work together) as a place where people could separate themselves from society and live a life of isolation in their dedication to God. Originally, a monastery was a building, or buildings, where people lived and worshipped, devoting their time and life to God.

Question: How would living here make it easy to devote your life to a religion?



"DevilInspired Medieval Dresses." : *Basic Designs and Colors*
in *Medieval Style Monk's Robes*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June

The people who lived in the monastery were called **monks** (member of religious order).

The first type of Medieval monastery adhered to the **Benedictine model**, where monks lived, prayed and worked in the monastery. The monastery was **self-contained**, meaning everything the monks needed was provided by the monastery community. They made their own clothes and grew their own food. They had no need for the outside world. This way they could be somewhat isolated and could focus on God. There were monasteries spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages.

The majority of the monk's day in the Middle Ages was spent praying, worshipping in church, reading the Bible, and **meditating** (thinking deeply or focusing your mind on something). The rest of the day was spent working hard on chores around the monastery. The monks would have different jobs depending on their talents and interests. Some worked the land farming food for the other monks to eat. Others washed the clothes, cooked the food, or did repairs around the monastery. Some monks were scribes and would spend their day copying manuscripts and making books.

Although the monks were focused on God and the monastery, they still played an important part in the community. Monasteries were a place where travelers could stay during the Middle Ages as there were very few inns during that time. They also helped to feed the poor and take care of the sick in the local community.



Monk and nun taking care
of the sick

"Main Page." *Wikimedia Commons*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 June 2014.

Question: Why do you think that the monks would take care of the sick?

The monks in the monasteries were some of the only people in the Middle Ages who knew how to read and write. As a result, monasteries became places that would be both

caretaker and **disseminator** (someone who spreads information) of the Christian message and its influence. Monasteries eventually became centers of learning and **sustainers** (keepers) of culture.

Preserve Christian Writings

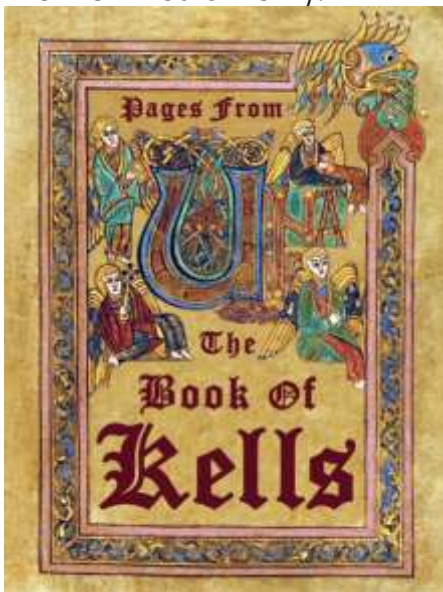
First, they preserved Christian writings, particularly the *Bible*, by producing hand-made copies that were kept and passed down through the ages. For example, Irish monasteries developed the **scriptorium** (place in monastery where manuscripts were copied), which became the heart of their monasteries.



Scriptorium

"Erik Kwakkel." *Erik Kwakkel*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 June 2014.

In this way, the great works of early Christians were safeguarded for history. It is in the context of preserving these **illuminated manuscripts** (text is supplemented by the use of decoration) that much of the great art of medieval Europe was created. One such example of this is the **Book of Kells** (illuminated manuscript Gospel written in Latin, containing the four Gospels of the New Testament).



Pages from the
Book of Kells



<http://www.from-ireland.net/cms/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/book-of-kells-ireland-3-150x150.jpg>

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/b1/KellsFol032vChristEnthroned.jpg/184px-KellsFol032vChristEnthroned.jpg>

Question: How did the Roman Catholic Church help to preserve history?

Centers of Learning

Secondly, monasteries became centers of learning. Initially spurred by **Charlemagne's** decree to educate boys, primarily in training for the priesthood, many **monastic** (relating to monks) centers had expanded their curricula to include a wider array of subjects by the 11th century. It is from these monastic learning centers that universities were first formed. The first university grew from the monastic schools surrounding Notre Dame Cathedral where students were allowed to study under any of the teachers within these schools. In addition, degrees in **theology** (study of religion) were most **esteemed** (respected).



Notre Dame Cathedral. Paris. France

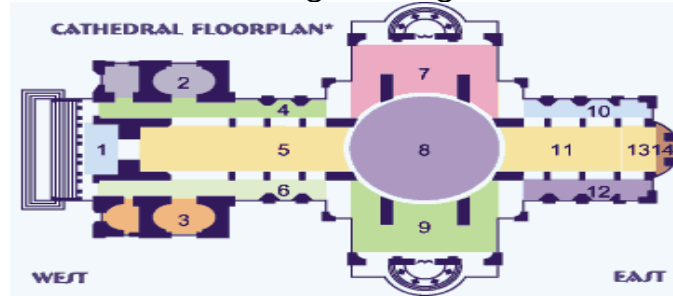
http://www.kingsacademy.com/mhodes/02_The-West-to-1900/07_The-High-Middle-Ages/pictures/Cathedral-Notre-Dame_Paris.jpg

The primary goal of the Roman Catholic Church and the core purpose of the monasteries were to influence people to become Christians. Monasteries originally attempted to become ideal communities which would spur people to live holier, more dedicated lives. Eventually monasteries created religious orders, some of which placed great emphasis on spreading Christianity and promoting the teachings of the Catholic Church. Two of the primary religious orders of the time were the **Franciscans** and the **Dominicans**.

Cathedrals

Many churches were built during the Middle Ages. The biggest of these churches were called **cathedrals**. Cathedrals were where bishops had their headquarters. Cathedrals were

built to inspire awe. They were the most expensive and beautiful buildings built. Sometimes construction on a cathedral could take two hundred years to finish. Most cathedrals were built in a similar fashion, with tall walls and high ceilings and laid out like a cross.



http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/images/arch_cath_cathedral_floorplan.gif

Some of the great art of the Middle Ages was produced in cathedrals. This included stained glass windows, sculpture, architecture, and painted murals.



[http://su-misura.nl/uploads/images/Gallery/rome-weekendie-wea/Santa Maria in Trastevere-inside.ipa](http://su-misura.nl/uploads/images/Gallery/rome-weekendie-wea/Santa_Maria_in_Trastevere-inside.ipa)



https://lorenashleigh.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/img_2069.jpg?w=225&h=300

Question: Why might it take so long to build a cathedral during the Middle Ages?

Question: What was the role of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages?