

The Catholic Church in the Middle Ages



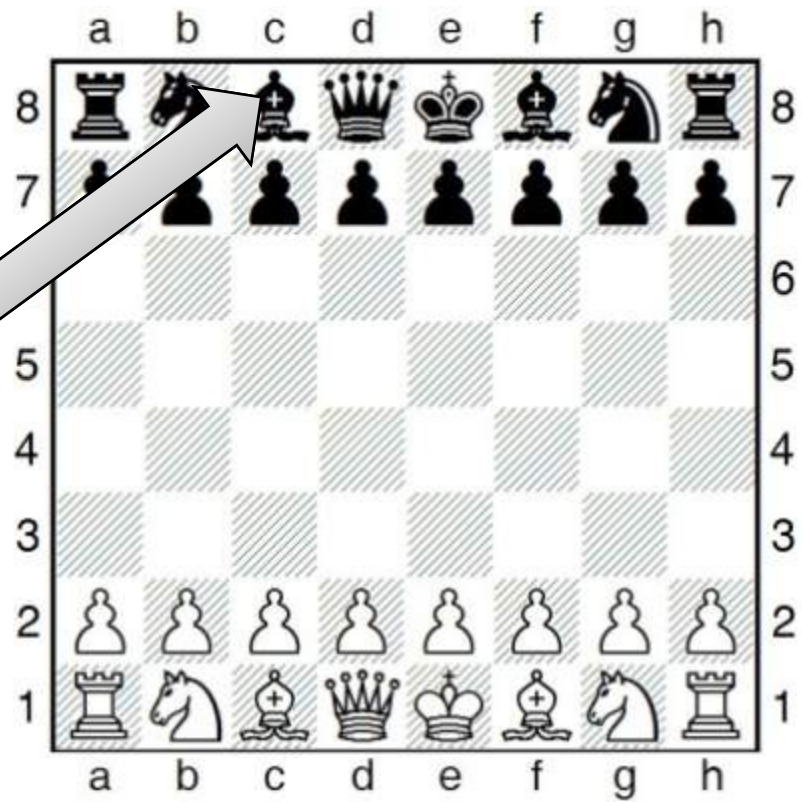
Pope

The pope was the head of the Roman Catholic Church and therefore considered to be God's representative on earth. Although he was a religious figure, the pope also had the power to influence politics and government through Papal Bulls (laws) and religious punishments. The Pope could punish individuals by kicking them out of the Church through **excommunication**. Also, he could punish entire groups/countries by placing them under **interdict** and refusing them the sacraments (e.g. baptism, communion, last rites, etc.).



Cardinal

Cardinals were senior officials in the Catholic Church who were responsible for giving advice to the Pope and electing a new Pope if the current one died or resigned from office. Cardinals dressed in red robes, capes, and caps and answered only to the Pope because of their high rank in the Catholic Church. In addition to their duties to the Pope, each cardinal was also responsible for preaching in his own church. From time to time, many cardinals also acted as advisors to kings and noblemen.



Bishop

Bishops were responsible for teaching people about the Catholic religion and governing the Church. Each bishop was responsible for his own **diocese**, or district, and the people living in it. Bishops educated the people, ordained (i.e. appointed) parish priests, and resolved religious disputes in his diocese. Bishops who had larger dioceses (e.g. one including a major city) were called **archbishops** and tended to hold more power than normal bishops. Regardless of where they were, however, many bishops were part of the upper class because they were oftentimes the second or third sons of noblemen who did not inherit any land from their fathers (only the oldest son received an inheritance).



Priest

Priests were in charge of local churches and providing the **sacraments** (baptism, confirmation, holy mass, confession, marriage, last rites, & ordination) to Catholics and keeping track of births and deaths. In order for Catholics to get into heaven, it was necessary for them to receive the sacraments. In the Catholic Church, each priest was in charge of a **parish** (an area usually covering a village or city and including the local church), with several parishes making up a diocese. This also meant that priests had to obey the orders of the bishop whose diocese they were a part of.

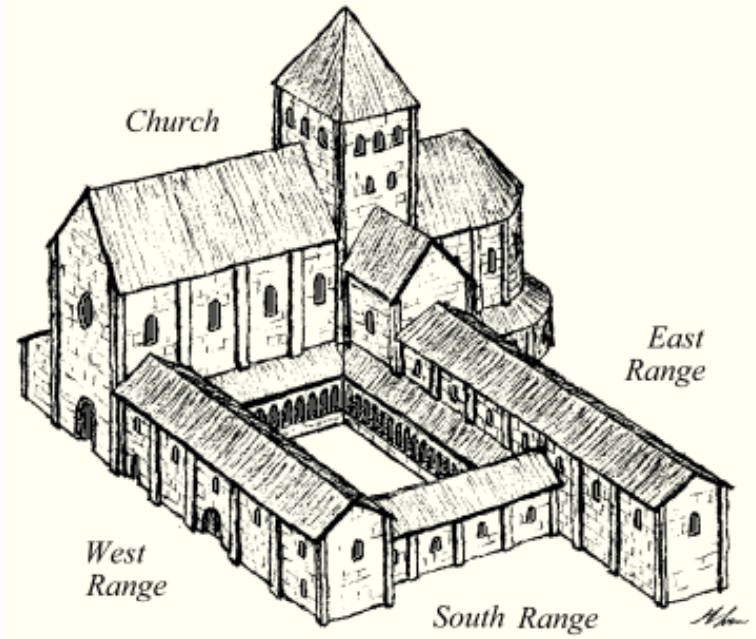


Abbot

Abbots were Church officials in charge of monasteries and convents and tended to be from a wealthy, noble family. Moreover, they were highly educated and gave advice to the monks and nuns they supervised. As with all officials in the Catholic Church, abbots were celibate (i.e. they were forbidden from having sex). Unlike other members of the Church, however, many abbots joined the clergy later on in life and were oftentimes widowers.



Typical Claustral Complex



Monks & Nuns

During the Middle Ages, many members of society often joined monasteries and convents to escape the suffering around them. Men who joined **monasteries** were called monks while women who joined **convents** were known as nuns. Both monks and nuns lived in isolated communities, grew their own food, learned to read and write Latin (the official language of the Church), and helped spread Christianity by educating people and copying religious texts.