



CONFLICT AND COMPLICATIONS.

In the 1080s, King William II told the Archbishop of Canterbury to 'clear off'. Knights of Henry II murdered another Archbishop of Canterbury in 1170. In the thirteenth century, King John is reported to have said to a deer he had just killed during a hunt, 'I envy you, lucky animal, at least you don't have to go to Church services'. Although English kings gave land and wealth to the Church they wanted to be in control of it. In 1345, Pope Clement VI said, 'If the king of England were to ask for his donkey to be made a **bishop**, we must not disagree with him'.

So, not everybody got on well with the Christian Church, or treated it with respect. Many ordinary people in the countryside were not happy having to give a 'tithe' (a tenth) of all they produced to the church. In the fifteenth century there are many examples of villagers **castrating** local priests they thought had forced women to have sex with them.

Many local priests were poor, badly educated and could hardly read the Latin in church services. Few of them owned a Bible, as it cost ten years' wages for a poor priest.

Think again...

But these problems are misleading. When King William II was very ill, in 1093, he prayed to God, asking God to forgive him all his sins. He gave back land he had stolen from the Church. Henry II was so sorry about what his knights had done that he knelt, barefoot, in Canterbury Cathedral, while monks whipped him. In 1210, King John was the first English ruler to give clothes and money to poor people on **Maundy Thursday**, after he had washed their feet. He was copying something Jesus had done the night before he was crucified. Even when Medieval kings had a row with the Church they still believed in Christianity. And none of them wanted to die without having made up with the Church.

Medieval kings could not have run the country without the help of educated priests. In the fourteenth century half of all the bishops in the country also had jobs running the government as well. This sometimes meant that people became bishops more because the king liked them than because they lived good and holy lives. But it still shows that the king relied on the Church.

And what about those attacks on priests? Well, even this shows that people expected something special from the Church. They thought it was important. They were angry when they were let down by people they felt they should be able to respect and trust.

NEW WORDS

ARCHBISHOP: an important Church leader. The Archbishop of Canterbury was head of the Church in England.

BISHOPS: important Church leaders, under an archbishop.

CASTRATE: to cut off a man's private parts.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: the Thursday before Easter, when Christians celebrate Jesus sharing the Last Supper with his followers.

Any Medieval person who could translate the first verse of Psalm 51, in the Bible, into Latin could claim 'benefit of clergy'. This meant they could not be hanged even if they had murdered someone. It became known as the 'neck verse'.



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1. Why was verse 1 of Psalm 51 called the 'neck verse'?

Look up this verse in the Bible. Why do you think this particular verse was chosen? Look at what it is about.

2. Explain how the evidence on the opposite page shows:

- a. The Church was not always popular.
- b. The Church always remained powerful, despite this.

3. From the clues in this BIG PICTURE, write about 'the impact of the Christian Church on people's lives'. Mention:

- The comfort and hope it gave them.
- How it helped organise their lives.
- The work it provided.
- Things people might sometimes have not liked.

So, how important was the Church in the Middle Ages?