

# Church History: “Doctrinal Compromise” 590-1215 (Part 5)

## What was Feudalism?

“When Vikings began sweeping out of the Northland, people increasingly surrendered both their lands and their persons to the many counts, dukes, and other local lords in return for protection. . . .The unsettled conditions caused by new invaders forced church officials to enter into close relations with the only power able to offer them protection: the feudal barons in France and the kings in Germany. Bishops and abbots thus become vassals, receiving fiefs for which they were obligated to provide the usual feudal services. This loyalty to higher lords created unusual conflicts for those bishops who looked to the pope as God’s appointed shepherd of the church.”  
“Church History” Bruce L. Shelley p.188

“For safety and for defense, people in the Middle Ages formed small communities around a central lord or master. Most people lived on a manor, which consisted of the castle, the church, the village, and the surrounding farm land. These manors were isolated, with occasional visits from peddlers, pilgrims on their way to the Crusades, or soldiers from other fiefdoms.

In this “feudal” system, the king awarded land grants or “fiefs” to his most important nobles, his barons, and his bishops, in return for their contribution of soldiers for the king’s armies. At the lowest echelon of society were the peasants, also called “serfs” or “villeins”. In exchange for living and working on his land, known as the “demesne,” the lord offered his peasants protection.

In the Middle Ages, there was definite structure in society. You were born into a class of people and generally stayed in that class for your entire life. Working hard did not change your status. Your clothing, food, marriage, homes, etc., were determined for you. For peasants, life was hard. They worked long hours every day just to ensure that their family had a roof over their head and food to eat. Serfs were not free: they were required to stay with the land and had to work several days a week for the lord of the manor. Religion was very important to the peasants. They believed that faith could take them to a world that was certainly easier than the one in which they lived. They generally observed the Sabbath and celebrated church holidays.  
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## What is scholasticism?

The 11<sup>th</sup> century was a time of new movements. The effort to harmonize reason and faith was the motive force of medieval Christian thought. The impact of philosophy led to a new approach to theology: Scholasticism. The approach was one of questioning, logic, speculation and

disputation. It was more important for the theologian to be a trained philosopher than a godly man. Theology had become a detached objective science. The impact of philosophy on theology began in the eleventh century with the emergence of reason (philosophy) as a method to be used in theology. In the thirteenth century, theology entered a new and more dangerous phase. Philosophy now appeared not just as a tool for use in theology but as a rival system of thought. This arose through the translation into Latin of Aristotle’s writings which presented a new way of looking at reality, a new world-view or philosophy of life as an alternative to Christianity.  
“Christian thought” Tony Lane p.76

## How did Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) resolve this dilemma?

The most important Scholastic scholar – and a key shaper of Christian theology – was Dominican priest Thomas Aquinas, who taught at the University of Paris. He argued that God’s greatest truths were in the Bible, but that Christians also must study nature, since it too was God’s work. Nature could be studied using the methods of logic and science. His writings became fundamental texts for Catholic theology, and opened up Christianity to the methods of logic and science.

## What did he believe and teach?

### About Salvation:

“However , the full knowledge of God – comes only through revelation. From this knowledge we discover man’s origin and destiny. Man is a sinner and in need of special grace from God. Jesus Christ, by His sacrifice, has secured the reconciliation of man and God. All who receive the benefits of Christ’s work are justified, but the key, as in traditional Catholic teaching, lies in the way the benefits of Christ’s work are applied. Christ won grace; the church imparts it. . .Assisted by this cooperating grace, a Christian can do works that please God and gain special merit in God’s sight.

“This saving grace, said Aquinas, comes to men exclusively through the channel of divinely appointed sacraments placed in the keeping of the church, the visible, organized roman body, led by the pope. So convinced was Aquinas of the divine sanction of the papacy that he insisted that submission to the pope was necessary for salvation.

### About the Lord’s Supper:

“The sacrament of all sacraments is the Lord’s Supper, which is more than the communion of the early church. In the Supper the essence or genuine being of the bread and wine are changed miraculously into the actual body and blood of Christ while the exterior remains unchanged: the doctrine of transubstantiation.

### **About one's final destiny:**

"The wicked, said Thomas, pass into hell. The faithful who have wisely used the means of grace pass immediately to heaven. But the mass of mankind, who while Christian in desire and participants in the sacraments, have followed Christ inadequately, must suffer further purification in purgatory before attaining the joys of heaven. . . Prayers to the saints in heaven can prevail to relieve the pains of souls in purgatory.

"Thus we come to the peak of ecclesiastical aspiration – and arrogance. The pope and his priests not only mediate the grace of God to sinners on earth by the miracle of the Blessed Sacrifice and by their prayers for the dead; they reach beyond the grace to minister to suffering souls. There is nothing new in this, but Thomas set the traditional teachings of the church in a grand, almost cosmic framework. "

"Church History" Bruce L Shelley pp.211,212

### **Why the Inquisition?**

Before the twelfth century, the Catholic Church gradually suppressed heresy, usually through a system of ecclesiastical tribunals. Initially, the persecution was carried out mostly by state authorities, but the Catholic Church gradually became more active as episcopal jurisdiction grew in power. The Church's punishment included excommunication, proscription, and imprisonment. Although many states allowed the Church to use the death penalty, initially it was not frequently imposed

**The Medieval Inquisition** is a term historians use to describe the various inquisitions that started around 1184 . It was in response to large popular movements throughout Europe considered apostate or heretical to Christianity. Just as Constantine assumed that his Empire needed one Church, with one creed to unify his subjects, so the Medieval world thought that conformity to the teachings of the Church was necessary in order to maintain the social fabric. The Church was fully integrated into the social system. No king could ascend his throne without the Church's blessing. Bishops and Abbots were also feudal lords, with serfs subject to their authority, and acted as royal advisers alongside the nobles. Kings were understood to be divinely anointed. To dissent from the teachings of the Church – or even to cease to worship in the Church – was regarded as undermining its authority. If the authority of the church was undermined, so was that of the king and his assistants. People who were considered heretics often questioned whether they needed the services of priests. They were also often critical of the wealth of the clergy, pointing out that Jesus had been poor. At bottom, a concern for the preservation of the social order informed the Inquisition. The secular rulers thought that if the authority of the church was questioned, the basis of their own authority and rights would be undermined and anarchy would ensue.

Innocent III, at the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran council, strengthened the Papacy's control over (Latin) Christian worship and claimed that kings, like all Christians, had to obey Papal decrees. He declared that salvation came only through sacraments administered by the church. He also established the Papacy as a temporal power, by claiming rule over territories in central Italy (the Papal States) and pressuring kings to grant the papacy several fiefdoms. Under his leadership the church acted to crush heresy by using torture to force heretics to confess, recant, and convert - a "judicial" procedure called the Inquisition. The Church also saw a threat in the presence of non-Christians in Christian Europe. It endorsed punitive taxes and restriction of Jews and tolerated popular anti-Jewish lies that demonized Jewish people. In the late 1200s -1300s, the Church encouraged European princes and kings to expel Jews from their territories, a process that culminated in 1492 with the expulsion of Jews from Spain.

Innocent III's reign marked the highpoint of papal power in the High Middle Ages.