The importance of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages is summed up by the following extract taken from Medieval Realms by Martin Collier et al …

- Religion was a matter of life or death - for almost everyone.
- Religious leaders - the leaders of the Christian Church - were as powerful as kings.
- The leader of the Church - the Pope, who was based in Rome - was probably the most powerful individual in Europe.
- The Church was rich. It owned masses of land and earned a lot of money. Tens of thousands of people worked for the Church.
- Every village in England had its own outpost of the Christian religion - a parish church, with its own priest, where once a week all the people came for Mass, to be told how to live, and to take one more step - so they hoped - on their road to heaven.

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The Structure of the Roman Catholic Church organisation in England

The Pope ruled the Church from Rome and all churchman owed him loyalty.

Two archbishops led the Church in England. One was situated at Canterbury and the other at Kent.

Bishops were in charge of large areas called dioceses.

Dioceses were divided into smaller areas called parishes, which were run by priests.

The king gave *fiefs* to bishops and abbots (heads of monasteries) and in return they owed him *dues*. Although the Pope had authority over the king in religious affairs they sometimes disagreed on other matters. This meant churchman had divided loyalties.
Thousands of modern British villages are built on the site of a medieval village. In many of them, only one medieval building has survived to the present day - the church. It is no coincidence that the churches have remained, while most medieval houses have been destroyed. Why was the Church so important in The Middle Ages?

Heaven or hell?
In the Middle Ages nearly everyone who lived in Britain and most of Western Europe was a Christian. They all belonged to the Roman Catholic Church because in The Middle Ages The Catholic religion was The only one. On Sundays and the many Holy Days everyone went to Mass, despite the fact that the services were in Latin which few parishioners would have understood. They learned about their faith from (a) wall paintings possibly showing the joys of heaven and the Torments of hell (b) from stained glass windows depicting scenes from the bible and © by listening to sermons from the parish priest. They believed that it was through the work of priests that they could come to know God and make - sure of a place in heaven after death.

It is hard for us to understand how much religion meant to medieval people. All around they saw suffering and grief. For most medieval people life was brutal and cruel. Plague, disease, famines and wars were frequent. This made them think about death a lot. People looked towards the Church for comfort and hope. The Christian Church taught that death led to eternal happiness for those who followed the ways of Christ. It also taught that sinners would burn forever in the fires of hell.

According to the Church there were two types of sin, mortal sin which could not be forgiven and venial sin which could be forgiven. It was the later sin which could be forgiven, either in life: by lived holy lives, attending church, going on a pilgrimage or by buying a special pardon called and Indulgence, or after life through purification in purgatory.

Those whose souls were not totally free of sin must endure purgatory - a state of purification thought to last about a thousand years. Here peoples sins would go through a purification process by fire.

People that were living could pray for those in purgatory and assist them in their path to heaven. They could also buy a pardon or indulgence for those already dead.
Why was the church so powerful?

It controlled people’s beliefs
See page 3 for explanation.

It owned land.
The Church owned large areas of land all over Europe and England. These were farmed and brought great wealth to the Church.

It was rich.
People could shorten their stay in purgatory by buying a special pardon for themselves or for someone who had already died—called a indulgence. The Church made a lot of money through this way. People were also expected to pay 1/10 of their income to the Church—called a tithe. The Church also charged people for some of the sacraments such as: baptism, confirmation, marriage, penance, communion, taking care of the sick and Holy Orders. The Church also did not have to pay taxes.

It was not controlled by the King.
The head of the Catholic Church was the Pope. He was very powerful and was not answerable to the king when it came to church matters. Even if a churchman committed a crime, they could not be tried in a normal court, but were tried by fellow churchman, who were often very lenient.

A king could be excommunicated from the Church by the Pope. This would mean that he would not receive the sacraments and meant that according to the Church he was going to hell!
A visit to Canterbury Cathedral

What is a cathedral?

England was divided into dioceses, each of which had a bishop. Each bishop had a throne. The word cathedral comes from the Latin word cathedra which means bishop's throne. So a cathedral is simply a church with a bishop's throne in it.

There were two types of cathedrals:
- Monastic cathedrals - cathedrals that were part of a monastery.
- Secular cathedrals - cathedrals which were run by priests.

Other functions of the cathedral were:
- Administrative Centre - a place to organise the diocese.
- Symbolism - to show the power of the Church.

Canterbury Cathedral?

The building of this famous cathedral was started in 1071 and was ordered by Lanfranc the Archbishop of Canterbury who was appointed by William the Conquer after his takeover of England. As he was appointed by a Norman King, Canterbury Cathedral was built in the "Romanesque" style.

The styles of church windows and doors during the Middle Ages.
The Cloister
The centre of daily life in the monastery. This was where the monks lived and where Lanfranc set up a school for local children. It was also where the monks were trained.

Martyrdom
A small altar marks the spot where, on 29 December 1170, Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered. It is called the Altar of the Sword's Point because it used to house the tip of Richard de Brito's sword which broke on the pavement as he attacked the Archbishop.

The Chapter House
This was where the monks would meet to hear a Chapter of the Rule of St Benedict read to them. They would deal with the business of the monastery.

The Nave
The Nave is at the centre of the cathedral. The present Nave was finished in 1405 and is an example of Perpendicular architecture. It replaced the Nave built by Lanfranc.

Library
Lanfranc built a large library. At the beginning of Lent, each monk in the monastery was given a book to read. By 1170 the library contained nearly 600 volumes, a vast number for those days.

Eastern Crypt
For 50 years after his death, Becket's body rested in a tomb in the crypt. This is where the first pilgrims to St Thomas Becket came to pray.

Shrine of St Thomas
There is now inscription on a brass plate and a burning candle to mark the point where St Thomas' shrine used to be. The shrine was destroyed on the orders of King Henry VIII who was involved in his own struggle with the Church.

Corona
This little chapel originally contained a part of Becket's skull which was cut off when he was murdered.

The Choir
The Choir is where the monks would attend the Mass. The choir is the longest of any English cathedral. It is also noted for its height. It was built in the Gothic style by William of Sens, and was finished in 1184.

Tomb of the Black Prince
Edward, Prince of Wales (1330—1376) was known as "the Black Prince" because of the colour of his armour. He was the son of Edward III and led the English in one of the greatest military triumphs against the French at the Battle of Poitiers in September 1356. He is buried in a magnificent shrine in the cathedral.

St Augustine's chair
This marble throne was originally made for the chapel dedicated to St Thomas. It is now the throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury.
Men who decided to dedicate their lives to God were called monks. Women who did the same were called nuns.

All monks and nuns had to make three vows:

- Poverty: No monks or nuns could own anything. All their processions were given to the community when they became a monk or nun.
- Chastity: No monk or nun could marry or have sex with anyone at all.
- Obedience: Monks and nuns had to obey the head of the monastery or covenant at all times and without question.

During the Middle Ages the number of monks and nuns increased greatly. E.g. in 1066 there was thought to be 1000 monks in Britain, this had risen to 13,000 by the beginning of the 13th century. Likewise the number of nuns had risen, it was estimated that at the beginning of the 13th century there was about 3000 nuns in Britain.

How did boys become monks?

Most boys would have stated their religious life at the age of about fifteen. They were called trainee monks, or novices. As a novice they would be supervised by a Master of Novices for at least a year. They would be taught how to do different jobs in the monastery and would sing in the choir. After about a year, and if the Master of Novices thought they were suitable, they would take the three vows that committed him to the monastic life and were given a tonsure (special haircut). At this point the real serious training of being a monk would start. He would have to learn what was expected of him at the different services (see table 1) and all the stages of a monk’s day. He would also be trained to become a useful member of the religious community, such as, for example, an illustrator or a cellarer (see page 8).

How did girls become Nuns?

Many girls were placed in Convents by their parents. In return the Church would receive a dowry from the parents. Some older women would become nuns after the death of their husband. Many convents or nunneries only accepted postulants from wealthy people. The postulancy would last one month and the novitiate a year after which vows would be taken. The solemn vows would be take four years later. Once these had been taken, the nun would wear a ring on her finger to symbolise that she was married to God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When?</th>
<th>What?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0200 hrs</td>
<td>Vigils—The night service, followed by reading and prayer until dawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>Lauds—A short service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0600 hrs</td>
<td>Prime—A short service followed by Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0700 hrs</td>
<td>Chapter—Monks listen to reading from the Rule of St Benedict, confess where they have broken the Rule and are disciplined, discuss the work for the day and sort out their duties. The monks then worked in the workshop or gardens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0900 hrs</td>
<td>Tierce—A short service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 hrs</td>
<td>Reading and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200 hrs</td>
<td>Sext—Short service after which the monks has a wash and then Prandium, the main meal of the day After the meal, another was and a rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500 hrs</td>
<td>Nones—A short service, then a drink and more work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800 hrs</td>
<td>Vespers—A short service followed by supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 hrs</td>
<td>Collation—Where one monk read aloud to the others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 hrs</td>
<td>Compline—The last service of the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2100 hrs</td>
<td>To bed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What did the monks do?

Abbot: I am in charge of the monastery. I make sure the monks keep to their vows.

Cellarer: I am in charge of all the goods in the cellarium. I deal with tradesman.

Refectorian: I am in charge of the refectory and the serving of food.

Precentor: I am responsible for the church services, the music and the choir books.

Chamberlain: I look after all the clothes and the bed linen. I also make sure the fire in the warming room is well stoked and there is enough hot water.

Sacristan: I look after the valuable line, the embroidered robes and banners and the gold and silver on the altar.

Almoner: I see to the distribution of food and clothing to the poor.

Novice Master: I teach the young novices and decide whether they are suited to become a monk.
How did the monastery impact on the community?

- It provided food and clothing for the poor.
- It provided employment.
- It provided health care.
- It copied out old books and kept information from being lost.
- Some monasteries taught children to read and write.
- It encouraged healthy living.
- It kept chronicles recording the events of the time.
**Cloister**
A covered walkway around an open square where monks read and wrote.

**Abbey Church**
Monks came here to worship God.

**Warming room**
The only room except for the kitchen and guest rooms, where monks were allowed to light a fire.

**Parlour**
The only place where monks were allowed to talk.

**Dormitory**
The monks slept here. It was connected to the church by a ‘night stairs’ so the monks could slip easily into the church at night.

**Infirmary**
A hospital for sick and old monks. Sometimes monks cared for other people, too, or did minor operations, for a fee.

**Refectory**
This is where the monks ate.

**Cellarium**
A huge store-room for wine and foodstuffs.

Fountains Abbey was founded in 1132 by Cistercian monks who had broken away from the Benedictine Order. Fountain Abbey became very rich and very powerful.
## Different Monk Orders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>When and where was the order founded?</th>
<th>When did the Order arrive in Britain?</th>
<th>What were the aims of the Order?</th>
<th>Did you know?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benedictine</td>
<td>In 525 by Benedict in Italy</td>
<td>597. Led by Augustine who founded a monastery at Canterbury and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury</td>
<td>To follow ST Benedict's Rule that would enable them to lead a godly life.</td>
<td>Called the “black monks” because of their black habits, which they wore over white gowns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cluniac</td>
<td>In 910 when William of Aquitaine gave land for a new monastery at Cluny in France</td>
<td>1077. First monastery built at Lewes in Sussex.</td>
<td>To lead a strict and holy life.</td>
<td>Followed St Benedict's Rule but spent more time praying and in church services than the Benedictines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cistercian</td>
<td>1098 by Robert de Champagne at Citeaux in France</td>
<td>1131. First monastery built at Rievaulx in Yorkshire.</td>
<td>To follow a strict interpretation of St Benedict's Rule.</td>
<td>Built monasteries in remote areas. Supported choir monks (full monks) and lay brothers who were not educated but who took vows and worked as labourers. Became skilled sheep farmers. Made their habits from the grey/white wool of their sheep and were called ‘white monks’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carthusian</td>
<td>1084 by St Bruno at Chartreuse in France</td>
<td>1178. First monastery built at Witham in Essex.</td>
<td>To lead a solitary life while keeping strictly to the Rule of St Benedict.</td>
<td>Lived in individual cells and hardly ever spoke. Ate one vegetarian meal a day. Strictest of all the Orders. Wore white habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominicans</td>
<td>1216 by St Dominic in Spain.</td>
<td>1221</td>
<td>To teach ordinary people about Christianity.</td>
<td>Better educated than most priests and very good teachers. Inspired by the ideas of St Francis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franciscans</td>
<td>1209 by St Francis of Assisi in Italy.</td>
<td>1224</td>
<td>To teach ordinary people about Christianity.</td>
<td>Travelled the country, without any possessions or money, teaching and preaching to ordinary people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Church provided Spiritual duties.

Medieval people were taught the terrors of hell in three ways:

- **Paintings**
  Through messages in paintings people would be reminded about heaven and hell.
- **Stain glass**
  Many of the windows in parish churches had stained glass. Each would have its own message, once again spreading the message of heaven and hell.
- **Sermons and stories**.
  The priest would tell his congregation stories so that they could understand what would happen if their sins were not forgiven when they died.

The Church had the following spiritual functions:

- The peasants took their babies to be baptised by the parish priest. As many babies died before their first birthday, baptism was important so that if the child died it would be able to go to heaven.
- Peasants were married in the church.
- Most were buried in the church graveyard.
- Peasants went there every Sunday and Holy day for Mass.
- They went there to confess their sins and gain forgiveness.

The Church provided temporal duties.

The parish priests had to collect the tithes, keep record of births, marriages and deaths, write wills, teach children and sometimes check the feudal dues were properly paid to the Lord.

Why was the Church so important to peasants?

All medieval villages had a church. It was the centre of village life.

Consider this! People felt themselves to be in the hands of God. God made them ill or healthy. God made the weather good or bad. God also made them rich or poor.

The church was the social hub of village life.

The church was more than a building to visit only on Sundays for all peasants.

- Markets were often held in the church as they were water-proof spaces.
- Sometimes the church would be used as theatres.
- Feasts and fairs were often held in the church or churchyards.
- People would often flee to the church if the village was under attack.