

Unit 4 How did the medieval church affect people's lives?

About the unit

In this unit pupils learn about the medieval church and its impact on people's everyday lives, about the beliefs of the Catholic Church, the concept of Christendom and the ways in which the one non-Christian (ie Jewish) community in Britain was treated. They learn about the role of monasteries and nunneries in medieval life and about criticisms of the medieval church. They will study questions of diversity and change.

This unit is expected to take 10–15 hours. There is scope to adjust some of the teaching activities to take account of time constraints in different schools.

Where the unit fits in

This unit links with unit 2 'Medieval monarchs' and to unit 3 'Medieval people'. It also provides the background for work on the religious changes and conflicts in the units relating to Britain 1550–1750. This unit links with unit 7B 'What's in a building?' in the art and design scheme of work.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most pupils will: demonstrate knowledge of the extent of Christendom and the way the Catholic Church was organised in the Middle Ages; understand the importance of the church to life in the Middle Ages; select and combine information from different sources when researching and describing how the church worked; describe aspects of the monastic life; identify some of the range of motives of medieval pilgrims; identify how the treatment of the Jewish minority changed 1066–1290

some pupils will not have made so much progress and will: demonstrate knowledge of the importance of the church in the Middle Ages and the work of a typical parish priest; extract some information from contemporary sources when working on aspects of the medieval church; describe some aspects of the lifestyle of medieval monks and nuns; show understanding of the different reasons that led medieval people to go on pilgrimages; describe some of the ways in which Jewish people were mistreated in the Middle Ages

some pupils will have progressed further and will: demonstrate detailed knowledge of the church as a powerful, international organisation in the Middle Ages; evaluate sources of information and identify those that are useful for research into aspects of the medieval church; explain the work of monks and nuns and show an understanding of differences between orders and between the work of monks and nuns; analyse the relationship between the work of the church and the beliefs and attitudes of people in the Middle Ages; show a detailed understanding of the changing position of Jewish people 1066–1290

Prior learning

It is helpful if pupils:

- have studied the arrival of Christianity in Britain as part of their key stage 2 work on Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings
- have considered questions relating to diversity in society, change, interpretation and are familiar with activities involving the use of a range of historical sources including buildings

Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit, pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- medieval religion, eg *Christendom*, *monastery*, *pilgrimage*, *relic*, *priest*, *heretic*, *purgatory*

Reading – through the activities pupils could:

- identify the main points in each paragraph, distinguishing key points from supporting material

Resources

Resources include:

- photographs of Rochester Cathedral or Durham Cathedral, of surviving monastic buildings and of a range of contrasting international medieval churches and/or cathedrals
- a plan or photograph of a medieval parish church in a village
- sources showing the work of a medieval parish priest
- a picture of a medieval doom painting
- sources showing discontent with and within the medieval church
- extracts from the *Canterbury tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer
- websites, eg <http://loki.stockton.edu/~ken/wharram/wharram.htm>; www.pro.gov.uk/education; www.remember.org

Out-of-school learning

Pupils could take the opportunity to visit surviving medieval churches; either local parish churches or grander monastic or cathedral churches.

Future learning

Pupils will be able to draw on knowledge of the medieval church when studying aspects of the Reformation in unit 5 'Elizabeth I'. They will develop their understanding of interpretations in units such as unit 6 'Islamic civilisations 600–1600'.

Why are so many of the surviving buildings from the Middle Ages churches?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that many of the buildings that survive from medieval times are churches because the church was rich and powerful • that people built their churches from stone because they wanted to show how important their Christian beliefs were • that Britain in the Middle Ages was part of Christendom | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with a particular example, <i>eg Rochester or Durham</i>, where the site of a medieval castle and a cathedral can be seen side by side, surrounded by houses from a later period. Invite pupils to speculate on the reasons why so many castles and churches have survived, while we have so few extant houses of more ordinary medieval people. Enable the pupils to infer that, like the warrior nobles of the castles, clergy were particularly rich and powerful people in the Middle Ages. • Show pupils pictures of great churches from a range of contrasting international locations, <i>eg St Magnus in Kirkwall, Orkney to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul</i>. Ask pupils to plot the location of these churches on a map of Europe and the Middle East. Introduce the idea of Christendom to describe the medieval view of the lands with a shared Christian culture. |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • draw conclusions from studying church buildings about the position of the church in the Middle Ages • use the term <i>Christendom</i> correctly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity centres on nationally famous 'great' churches, but could equally well begin by looking at a photograph or other source material of a deserted village, <i>eg Wharram Percy</i>, where only the stone church survives. • ICT: Pupils could use a website about a deserted medieval village such as Wharram Percy to find information about key issues, <i>eg comparing the construction of medieval houses and churches or cathedrals</i>. The pupils should answer key questions such as <i>How long after the desertion of the village did the church at Wharram Percy remain in use?</i> |
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What impact did parish churches have on people's lives?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the role of the parish priest in medieval village life • that the church used wall paintings to teach people about Christian beliefs in heaven, hell and purgatory • to select relevant information from a range of sources about the work of a parish priest and to combine and summarise information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on village churches and look at photographs/plans showing the dominant place the church building had in the village. <i>Did it have a similarly dominant place in village life and the lives of the villagers?</i> • Introduce the idea of the local parish priest and explain his place in the organisational structure of the Catholic Church. • Pupils, either individually or in groups, work with a range of sources dealing with areas of the priest's work, <i>eg baptism, burial, marriage, collecting tithes, working glebe land</i>. Ask pupils to work in groups to find out what advice a father might give his son who has just told him he wants to become a parish priest. This advice could be presented in written form or acted out to the whole class as a role play/dialogue. • Talk about the way the church influenced how people thought about heaven and hell. Using a surviving doom painting from the chancel arch of a church as a source, emphasise the power of a literal belief in the torments of hell, the sufferings in purgatory, and the promise of paradise if people followed the teachings of the church. Ask pupils to annotate the doom painting appropriately. |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use sources in order to reach and support conclusions about the work of a parish priest • demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which doom paintings teach some medieval Christian beliefs • select and combine information from various sources to produce structured work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole unit could be linked to local fieldwork in which pupils are asked to make sense of the way a particular local church might have dominated the local community in the Middle Ages. • ICT: display a doom painting copied and pasted from a CD-ROM to the whole class using a large screen, electronic whiteboard or projector. Discuss the impact of the picture on medieval parishioners. Pupils could work in groups to annotate the picture using a word processor. They could use this analysis as the basis for a word-processed account of the beliefs of medieval peasants. |
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What impact did monks and nuns have on people's everyday life?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the internal organisation of monasteries and nunneries and of the rules underpinning this • that men and women became monks and nuns for a variety of reasons • about aspects of the beliefs and lives of monks and nuns • that the Catholic Church had control over a wide range of activities during the Middle Ages • to select and use sources for an investigation about the work of monks and nuns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind pupils of the work they have done on the surviving medieval churches and cathedrals. Tell them about surviving monastic buildings, <i>eg Cleve, Rievaulx, Tintern, Much Wenlock</i>, using photographs. • Establish the monastic context, <i>eg the rule of St Benedict, the daily routine and the function and purpose of the monastic life</i>. • Ask pupils to brainstorm the paradox that the monastic life was one of great hardship but one that appealed to many people. <i>Why? What reasons might men and women have for entering the monastic life?</i> • Describe briefly the basic differences between different religious orders, <i>eg Benedictines, Cistercians, Carthusians, Augustinians and Gilbertines</i>. • Give pupils 'character cards' on different sorts of work undertaken by monks and nuns, <i>eg chronicler, infirmarian, prioress</i>, from different periods and orders. Remind pupils that the most important activity of monks and nuns was prayer. Ask pupils, in pairs, to introduce each other in role as monks or nuns, and explain why what they do is important and to whom. Other pupils listen and ask questions. • Ask pupils to carry out further, structured research on points identified above, adding additional, relevant information to each 'character card', which are then assembled to form a class display. Tell pupils to focus on the main points in each paragraph, so that they can quickly access information. They could then go back over the text, reading the supporting material, eliciting much more detailed information. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the reasons why men and women became monks and nuns • identify similarities and differences between the experiences of monks and nuns from different places and periods • identify and explain the range of activities undertaken by the medieval church • select and use sources for an investigation to produce a summary appropriate for display | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers may wish to focus on one particular facet of church power, <i>eg the control of knowledge</i>. There is scope here for some fruitful comparison with the present day. Pupils could, for example, discuss the way knowledge is transmitted today, particularly through the mass media and ICT. They could compare this with the situation in the Middle Ages when all books were handwritten and, at least in the early Middle Ages, produced by clergy. This links with work in citizenship about the significance of the media in society. • Key skills: some of these activities provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate evidence of improving through learning and performance (independent research, checking accuracy of the information they submit for the class display). |
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Why did people go on pilgrimages?

- that pilgrimage and the cult of relics were important parts of medieval religion
- that people went on pilgrimages for a mixture of reasons
- to begin to evaluate a fictional interpretation of medieval pilgrims
- Discuss the great prominence given to relics in medieval churches. Provide information about some of the most famous relics such as the glass container with the blood of Christ at Hailes and the body of Becket at Canterbury. Explain that relics were thought to have special power and prayers in churches with holy relics were thought to be particularly effective in curing illnesses and in speeding souls through purgatory.
- Describe how people went on journeys or pilgrimages to visit churches and shrines with famous relics. Discuss the various possible motives of pilgrims, including those who travelled to get closer to God and those for whom pilgrimages were pleasurable holidays.
- Tell pupils about Chaucer and the *Canterbury tales*. Using extracts from a modern translation, provide descriptions of different pilgrims. Ask pupils to judge, in the case of each pilgrim, whether he or she was motivated by religion or pleasure in the decision to go on pilgrimages. Through discussion, help pupils to consider how helpful Chaucer's writings are to a historian wanting to find out about pilgrimages.

Alternative activity

- Read an extract either from one of the Cadfael stories by Ellis Peters, which show medieval pilgrims in the Benedictine Abbey at Shrewsbury, or from the *Canterbury tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. Ask pupils to use their knowledge of medieval religion to evaluate how realistic this piece of historical fiction is.

- demonstrate an understanding of the many and varied motives of medieval pilgrims
- make critical use of a key source in order to reach and support a conclusion about the motives of medieval pilgrims
- begin to evaluate the historical accuracy of a fictional account of a pilgrimage
- Teachers could start this section by getting pupils to look at a number of extracts from *Canterbury tales*. Ask questions such as *Who are these people? Where are they going? Why?*
- An alternative activity is suggested if teachers have used a lot of sources by Geoffrey Chaucer and/or would prefer an activity using a modern source.
- Chaucer presents a fictional picture of medieval pilgrims. Teachers can discuss the value and limitations of a piece of fiction as a source.
- Teachers can give some background information on Geoffrey Chaucer, stressing that he was a layman and wrote in English in the later Middle Ages. As a supplementary activity, pupils could be given an original extract from the *Canterbury tales* and asked to see how much sense they can make of it, and how much the English language has changed during the last 600 years. Some CD-ROMs provide opportunities for pupils to hear Chaucer's work read aloud.

Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

Was everyone in Britain a Christian?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the contribution Jewish people made to English medieval life • about the way Jewish people were persecuted during the medieval period • to analyse a range of sources for evidence of attitudes of medieval Christians to Jews, and to use them to suggest reasons for the expulsion of Jews in 1290 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind pupils of the earlier work they did on Christendom and of what medieval Christendom was. • Tell pupils that everyone in England was expected to be a Christian and to go to church, with one exception: the Jews. Tell pupils that there was a significant Jewish community in England 1066–1290, and about the contribution made by Jews to English medieval society. • Ask pupils to consider a range of sources of information about the treatment of Jews in order to determine the attitude of Christians to Jews prior to their expulsion in 1290 and to decide why the Jews were expelled then. • Ask pupils to prepare a petition to be delivered to Edward I that aims to persuade him to let the Jews stay in England. Discuss why such a petition would have failed. |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe the role played by Jews in medieval English society • select and use information from several sources to show the predominant medieval Christian attitude to Jews and explain why Jews were expelled in 1290 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the treatment of the Jewish minority can include reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – laws restricting Jewish people and forcing them to wear distinguishing badges – the massacres in 1189 – the mass suicide of the Jews of York in 1190 – the brutal expulsion of 1290 • Teachers need to be aware of the sensitivities of this topic, as well as the need to avoid stereotypes. • ICT: discuss what makes human beings suspicious or afraid of each other. Pupils could interrogate bookmarked – or otherwise preselected – websites to find out why medieval Christians were suspicious and sometimes afraid of Jews. It is not recommended that pupils should search the internet themselves for information for this topic. • Language for learning: teachers could provide some guidelines on how to write a petition. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – clausal, explanatory nature of sentences, <i>eg we, the undersigned, would like to plead that ...</i> – greater use of abstract nouns, <i>eg hope, pity, fear, justice</i> – greater number of adverbs, <i>eg horribly, terribly</i> |
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Were there rumblings of discontent about the ways in which the church affected people?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to review their knowledge of the way the church dominated medieval life • about discontent within and about the church • to select, organise and use relevant information to produce structured work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell pupils that not everyone living in medieval times was happy with the ways in which the church affected people's lives, nor with the attitudes and lifestyles of some church people. • Give pupils a range of source material showing discontent within and about the medieval church. Ask pupils to evaluate the material, <i>eg How reliable is this source? Are these sources evidence of problems within the medieval church?</i> • As a class arrive at a consensus, using evidence from work done. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate and prioritise sources of information illustrating the problems to be tackled by the church • demonstrate knowledge of the ways in which the church affected the lives of villagers • select, organise and use relevant information to put across a point of view about the impact the medieval church had on people's lives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include source material showing discontent, <i>eg John Wycliffe and the Lollards; the worldliness of priests; rowdy/bawdy behaviour in monasteries and nunneries; data about the numbers entering the monastic life.</i> • Chaucer's vignettes in the <i>Canterbury tales</i> are useful sources for the first activity, but tell pupils that Chaucer was writing a satire. |
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How did the medieval church affect people's lives?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to select, use and deploy information from their work on the medieval church to present a point of view • to evaluate their own interpretations for historical accuracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide pupils with information cards about individuals in medieval times drawn from different parts of society, <i>eg a villager, a friar, a wealthy merchant</i>. Provide sufficient contextual information to avoid stereotyping. • Pupils, in groups, work with one role card. Using the sources and information in this unit, they work out how the life of 'their' individual was affected by the medieval church. They can give 'their' individual a character, <i>eg a grumbler, poor and occasionally dishonest, rich and arrogant, a worrier</i>, in order to give variety and shading. They must, however, work within role and within context. Anachronisms are not permitted! • Groups make a presentation to describe how their individual's life was affected by the church. This could be presented either as a monologue or by a structured discussion between all the individuals represented, and could be followed by a class discussion as to whether the role play was authentic or not. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate an understanding of the effects of the medieval church on the life of one specific individual • evaluate role play for historical accuracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this final, summative unit, pupils revisit earlier work in order to pull the various strands and themes together in a considered, thoughtful answer. It is structured to ensure pupils use their knowledge and understanding in presenting a point of view. • The role card must avoid stereotyping. This can be done by using actual individuals if work on local history has included the medieval period, and individuals can be identified. It can also be done by providing sufficient information so that an imaginary individual can be personalised. • Remember to avoid gender bias when creating the role information cards. |
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