

Christianity and Medieval Society

SECTION

3

If YOU were there...

You are a stone carver, apprenticed to a master builder. The bishop has hired your master to design a huge new church. He wants the church to inspire and impress worshippers with the glory of God. Your master has entrusted you with the decoration of the outside of the church. You are excited by the challenge.

What kind of art will you create for the church?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Thousands of churches were built across Europe in the Middle Ages. People took great pride in their churches because religion was very important to them. In fact, Christianity was a key factor in shaping medieval society.

The Church Shapes Society and Politics

Nearly everyone who lived in Europe during the Middle Ages was Christian. In fact, Christianity was central to every part of life. **Church officials, called clergy,** and their teachings were very influential in European culture and politics.

The towers of old Christian churches still rise above many European towns and cities. Christianity became a strong influence on European life in the Middle Ages.

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. The Christian Church shaped both society and politics in medieval Europe.
2. Orders of monks and friars did not like the church's political nature.
3. Church leaders helped build the first universities in Europe.
4. The church influenced the arts in medieval Europe.

The Big Idea

The Christian Church was central to life in the Middle Ages.

Key Terms and People

clergy, p. 533

religious order, p. 536

Francis of Assisi, p. 536

friars, p. 536

Thomas Aquinas, p. 537

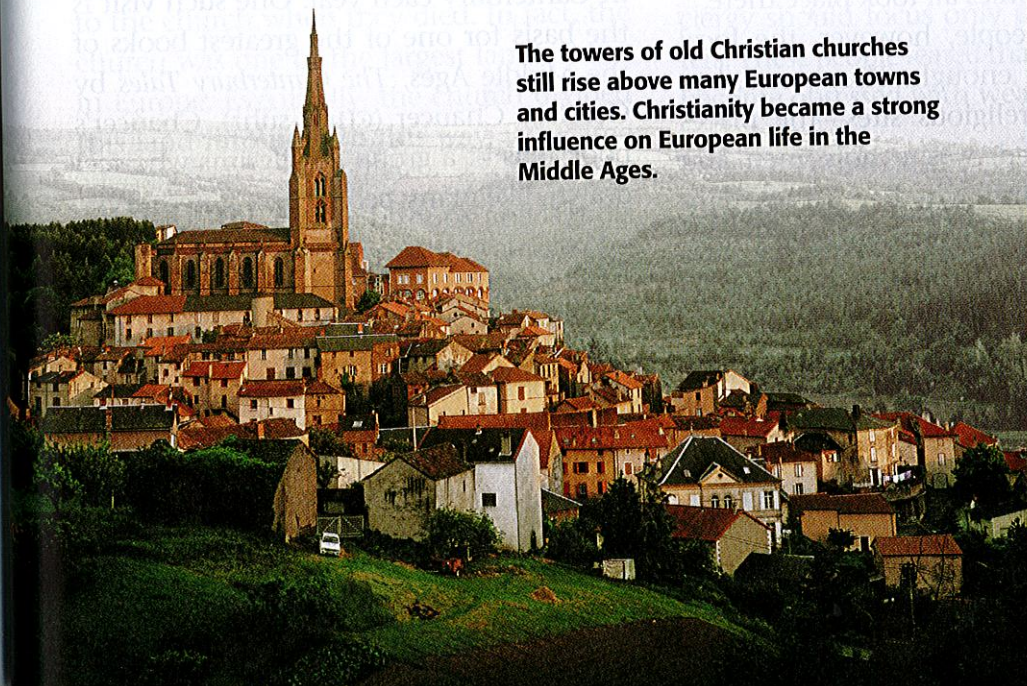
natural law, p. 538



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on the many roles the Catholic Church played in Europe in the Middle Ages.



History Close-up

The Cluny Monastery

The great monastery at Cluny, France, is shown here as it appeared in the 1100s. Together the buildings made up something like a small town. At one point, more than 300 monks lived there.

Meals were served in the dining hall, called a refectory.

Monks could read by the light from windows above each bed in the dormitory, where they slept.

When monks were ill or old, they were treated in the infirmary.

Servants lived in rooms above the stables, where the monks kept horses.

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

How does this illustration show the wealth of the church?

The Church and Society

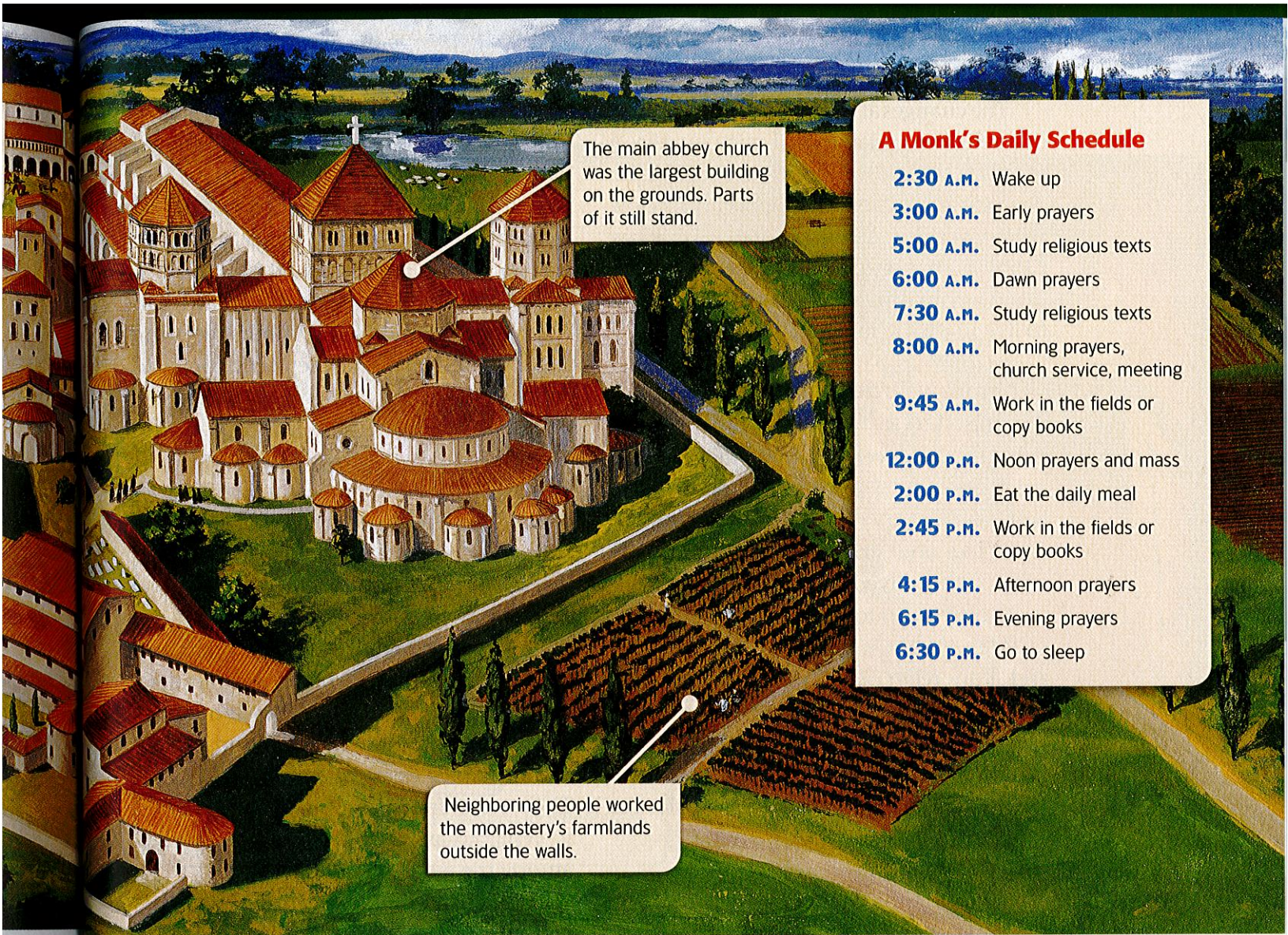
In the Middle Ages, life revolved around the local church. Markets, festivals, and religious ceremonies all took place there.

For some people, however, the local church was not enough. They wanted to see important religious sites—the places where Jesus lived, where holy men and women died, and where miracles happened. The church encouraged these people to go on pilgrimages, journeys to religious locations. Among the most popular destinations were Jerusalem, Rome, and Compostela, in northwestern Spain. Each of these cities had churches that Christians wanted to visit.

Another popular pilgrimage destination was Canterbury, near London in England. Hundreds of visitors went to the cathedral in Canterbury each year. One such visit is the basis for one of the greatest books of the Middle Ages, *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (CHAW-suhr). Chaucer's book tells of a group of pilgrims who feel drawn, like many people, to Canterbury:

“When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root . . .
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands
And specially, from every shire's end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend.”

—Geoffrey Chaucer, from *The Canterbury Tales*



The main abbey church was the largest building on the grounds. Parts of it still stand.

Neighboring people worked the monastery's farmlands outside the walls.

A Monk's Daily Schedule

- 2:30 A.M.** Wake up
- 3:00 A.M.** Early prayers
- 5:00 A.M.** Study religious texts
- 6:00 A.M.** Dawn prayers
- 7:30 A.M.** Study religious texts
- 8:00 A.M.** Morning prayers, church service, meeting
- 9:45 A.M.** Work in the fields or copy books
- 12:00 P.M.** Noon prayers and mass
- 2:00 P.M.** Eat the daily meal
- 2:45 P.M.** Work in the fields or copy books
- 4:15 P.M.** Afternoon prayers
- 6:15 P.M.** Evening prayers
- 6:30 P.M.** Go to sleep

The Church and Politics

The church also gained political power during the Middle Ages. Many people left land to the church when they died. In fact, the church was one of the largest landholders in Europe. Eventually, the church divided this land into fiefs. In this way, it became a feudal lord.

Of all the clergy, bishops and abbots were most involved in political matters. They often advised local rulers. Some clergy got so involved with politics that they spent little time dealing with religious affairs.

READING CHECK Analyzing In what ways were clergy members important political figures?

Monks and Friars

Some people were unhappy with the political nature of the church. They thought the clergy should focus only on spiritual matters. These people feared that the church had become obsessed with wealth and power.

The Monks of Cluny

Among those unhappy with the church were a group of French monks. In the early 900s they started a monastery in the town of Cluny (KLOO-nee). The monks of Cluny followed a strict schedule of prayers and religious services. They paid little attention to the world, concerning themselves only with religious matters.

The changes at Cluny led to the creation of a religious order, the Cluniac monks. **A religious order is a group of people who dedicate their lives to religion and follow common rules.** Across Europe, people saw Cluny as an example of how monks should live. They built new monasteries and tried to live like the Cluniacs.

Other New Orders

By the 1100s, though, some monks thought that even Cluny's rules weren't strict enough. They created new orders with even stricter rules. Some took vows of silence and stopped speaking to each other. Others lived in tiny rooms and left them only to go to church services.

Men were not the only ones to create and join religious orders. Women were allowed to join these kinds of orders as well. Communities of nuns called convents appeared across Europe. Like monks, these nuns lived according to a strict set

of rules. The nuns of each convent prayed and worked together under the watchful eyes of an abbess, the convent's leader.

Although monks and nuns lived apart from other people, they did a great deal for society. For example, they collected and stored texts that explained Christian teachings. Monks spent hours copying these documents, and they sent copies to monasteries across Europe.

The Friars

Not everyone who joined a religious order wanted to live apart from society. Some wanted to live in cities and spread Christian teachings. As a result, two new religious orders were begun in the early 1200s.

These orders were the Dominicans and the Franciscans, named for their founders, Dominic de Guzmán and **Francis of Assisi**. Because they didn't live in monasteries, members of these orders were not monks. They were **friars, people who belonged to religious orders but lived and worked among the general public.**

Friars lived simply, wearing plain robes and no shoes. Like monks, they owned no property. They roamed about, preaching and begging for food. For that reason, friars were also called mendicants, from a Latin word for beggars.

The main goal of the friars was to teach people how to live good Christian lives. They taught people about generosity and kindness. A prayer credited to Francis illustrates what the friars hoped to do:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.”

—Francis of Assisi, from *The Prayer of Saint Francis*

READING CHECK Summarizing Why did people create new religious orders?



BIOGRAPHY

Francis of Assisi

c. 1182–1226

Born in Assisi, Italy, Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant. As a young man, however, Francis gave all his money and possessions away and left his father's house. He lived a simple life, preaching and tending to people who were poor or ill. Francis considered everyone his brother or sister, including animals. He encouraged people to take care of animals just as they would take care of other people. Within a few years other people had begun to copy his lifestyle. In 1210 they became the first members of the Franciscan Order.

Making Generalizations How do you think Francis's generosity and compassion might inspire Christians to follow the church's teachings?

School Days

Did you know that many customs that schools and universities follow today began in the Middle Ages? For example, medieval teachers taught groups of students instead of individuals. Classes ran according to a fixed schedule, and students had to take tests. At night, students went to their rooms to study and complete assignments. Many students participated in sports such as races and ball games after classes. At graduation, students dressed up in caps and gowns. All of these customs are still common today.

Medieval universities were not exactly the same as universities are now, however. Medieval students entered the university at age 14, and only boys could attend.



ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING INFORMATION

Why do you think some customs followed by universities in the Middle Ages have lasted until today?

Universities Are Built

While some people were drawing away from the world in monasteries and convents, others were looking for ways to learn more about it. In time, their search for knowledge led to the creation of Europe's first universities.

Some of the earliest universities were created by the church. The church's goal was to teach people about religion. Other universities were created by groups of students who went searching for teachers who could tell them about the world.

Most teachers in these universities were members of the clergy. Besides religion, schools taught law, medicine, astronomy, and other courses. All classes were taught in Latin. Although relatively few people in

Europe spoke Latin, it was the language of scholars and the church.

As people began to study new subjects, some of them developed new ideas about the world. In particular, they wondered how human reason and Christian faith were related. In the past, people had believed that some things could be proven with reason, but other things had to be taken on faith. Some people in universities, though, began to wonder if the two ideas could work together.

One such person was the Dominican philosopher **Thomas Aquinas** (uh-KWY-nuhs). Thomas was a teacher at the University of Paris. He argued that rational thought could be used to support Christian beliefs. For example, he wrote an argument to prove the existence of God.

Thomas also believed that God had created a law that governed how the world operated. He called it **natural law**. If people could study and learn more about this law, he argued, they could learn to live the way God wanted.

READING CHECK **Generalizing** How did universities help create new ideas?

The Church and the Arts

In addition to politics and education, the church was also a strong influence on art and architecture. Throughout the Middle Ages, religious feeling inspired artists and architects to create beautiful works of art.

Religious Architecture

Many of Europe's churches were incredible works of art. The grandest of these churches were cathedrals, large churches in which bishops led religious services. Beginning in the 1100s Europeans built their cathedrals using a dramatic new style called Gothic architecture.

Gothic cathedrals were not only places to pray, but also symbols of people's faith.



BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Aquinas

1225–1274

Though he was born in Italy, Thomas Aquinas lived most of his life in France. As a student and then a teacher at the University of Paris, Thomas spent most of his time in study.

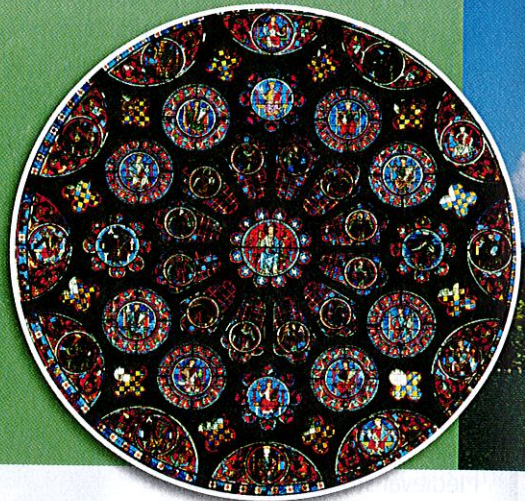
He wrote a book called the *Summa Theologica*, in which he argued that science and religion were related.

Although some people did not like Thomas's ideas, most considered him the greatest thinker of the Middle Ages. Later teachers modeled their lessons after his ideas.

Making Generalizations Why might people believe someone is a great thinker even if they disagree with his or her ideas?

Gothic Architecture

One of the most beautiful of all Gothic cathedrals is in Chartres (SHAHRHT), near Paris, France. At 112 feet high it is about as tall as a 10-story building.



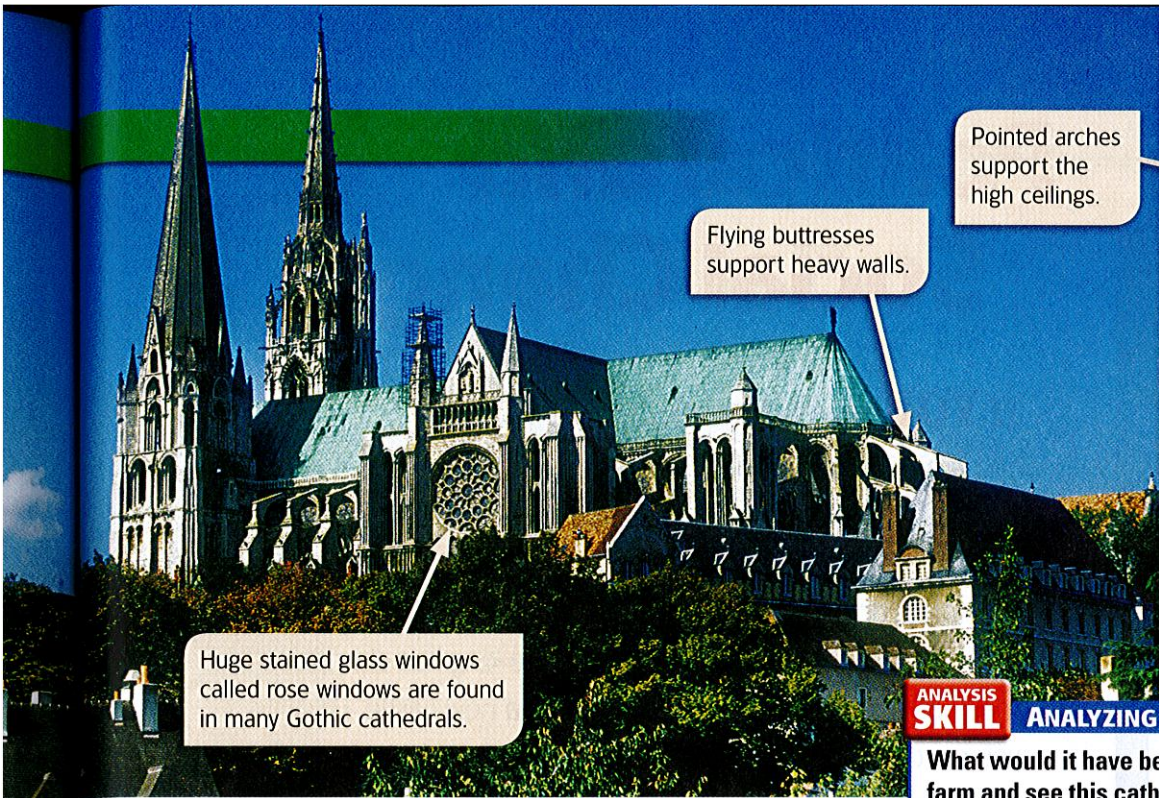
As a result, they were towering works of great majesty and glory.

What made these Gothic churches so unusual? For one thing, they were much taller than older churches. The walls often rose up hundreds of feet, and the ceilings seemed to reach to heaven. Huge windows of stained glass let sunlight pour in, filling the churches with dazzling colors. Many of these amazing churches still exist. People continue to worship in them and admire their beauty.

Religious Art

Medieval churches were also filled with beautiful objects created to show respect for God. Ornate paintings and tapestries covered the walls and ceilings. Even the clothing priests wore during religious services was attractive. Their robes were often highly decorated, sometimes with threads made out of gold.

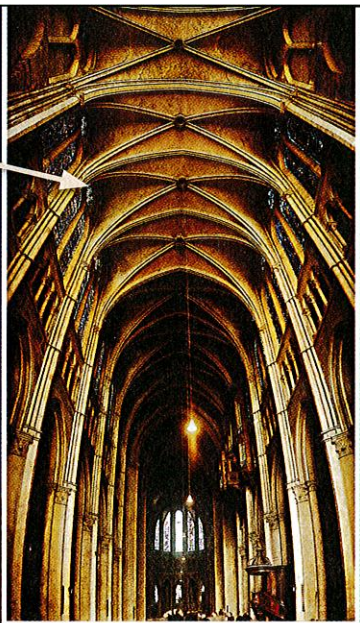
Many of the books used during religious ceremonies were beautiful objects. Monks had copied these books carefully.



Pointed arches support the high ceilings.

Flying buttresses support heavy walls.

Huge stained glass windows called rose windows are found in many Gothic cathedrals.



ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING VISUALS

What would it have been like to travel from a small farm and see this cathedral for the first time?

They also decorated them using bright colors to adorn the first letters and the borders of each page. Some monks added thin sheets of silver and gold to the pages. Because the pages seem to glow, we use the word *illuminated* to describe them.

READING CHECK **Generalizing** How were medieval art and religion related?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Besides its religious role, the church played important roles in politics, education, and the arts. The church changed as time passed. In the next section, you will learn about other changes that took place in Europe at the same time. These changes created new political systems around the continent.

Section 3 Assessment hmhsocialstudies.com **ONLINE QUIZ**

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

1. **a. Recall** What are church officials called?
b. Explain Why did people go on pilgrimages?
2. **a. Identify** What new monastery founded in France in the 900s served as an example to people around Europe?
b. Contrast How were **friars** different from monks?
3. **Analyze** How did **Thomas Aquinas** think reason and faith could work together?
4. **a. Identify** What new style of religious architecture developed in Europe in the 1100s?
b. Elaborate Why do you think so much of the art created in the Middle Ages was religious?

Critical Thinking

5. **Categorizing** Draw a chart like the one below. Using your notes, decide which of the church's roles were political, which were intellectual, and which were artistic. List each role in the appropriate column of your chart.

The Church in the Middle Ages		
Political	Intellectual	Artistic

FOCUS ON WRITING

6. **Taking Notes on Church Leaders** In this section, you've read about at least two people who became saints. Add them to your list and note why they're important.