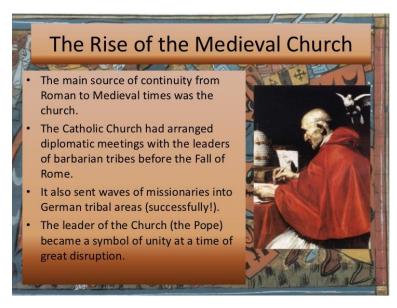# The Church's Power Grows

In the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church became more organized and powerful. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Church played a huge role in the growth of European civilization.

The Rise of the Medieval Church

- The main source of continuity from Roman to Medieval times was the church.
- The Catholic Church had arranged diplomatic meetings with the leaders of barbarian tribes before the Fall of Rome.
- It also sent waves of missionaries into German tribal areas (successfully!).
- The leader of the Church (the Pope) became a symbol of unity at a time of great disruption.

By the 300s A.D., the Church had developed a system of organization. Local Christian communities were called parishes and were led by priests. A group of parishes was headed by a bishop. In early times, all bishops were thought to be equals. However, this changed over time. Gradually, the bishops from five of the most important cities gained power.

The bishops of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Constantinople became the most powerful men in the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually, the bishop of Rome said that he should have authority over all other bishops. He argued that Peter, one of the 12 apostles and one of the earliest leaders of Christianity, was the father of the Church and the first bishop of Rome. Therefore, the Roman bishop should have more authority than other bishops. Although the other cities disagreed, the bishop of Rome became known as the Pope. 'Pope' means 'father' in Latin and Greek.

Western Christians accepted the Pope as head of the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope started as only a religious leader. But, because of Gregory I, an early Pope, the Church claimed political power as well as spiritual power. Gregory I served as Pope from 590 to 604. He was head of the Church and leader of the city of Rome.

The Roman Catholic Church had influence over everything in Europe, from political events to the daily lives of peasants. Kings started wars in the name of Christianity. Missionaries spread their faith across Europe. The Church's power grew.

Church leaders thought that all of Europe should be brought together under the Roman Catholic Church. Medieval Popes claimed papal supremacy, or authority over all non-religious rulers. Popes had ways to reverse decisions made by rulers of countries such as the kings of France and England. By the Middle Ages, the Church was the most powerful force in Europe.

Check for Understanding:

1. What were local Christian communities were called?
   a. Countries   b. parishes   c. dioceses   d. regions
2. Which bishop became known as the Pope?
   a. Antioch   b. Jerusalem   c. Constantinople   d. Rome
3. What kind of power did the Pope have?
   a. Political power   b. spiritual power   c. political and spiritual power   d. none of the above
4. What is the term when the Pope has authority over all non-religious rulers?
   a. Papal supremacy   b. papal superiority   c. papal power   d. Pope's right