

Belief and Devotion

1. The Role of Religion
2. The Church
3. Monastic Life



1. The Role of Religion

- Almost all Western Europeans were devoutly Christian
- Believed very strongly in the ultimate struggle between good and evil



- This battle was also very personal. Every person had to struggle between good and evil throughout their lives



- Everybody took for granted that good people went to heaven, and bad people suffered in hell for all eternity
- How could people avoid this fate?...



- Sins could be forgiven by participating in religious ceremonies, specifically those that took place in church



God was everywhere!

- People found religious explanations for everything in their lives, whether good or bad



For example...

- Why did we have such great weather this summer, giving us a great growing season?



- Why did we lose that battle?



- Why is the grass green and the sky blue?



2. The Church

- In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church was the only religious institution in Europe
- Christians could practice their religion only through the Church, so the Church became extremely powerful

- One of the worst things that could happen to a person was to be excommunicated from the Church
- An excommunicated person could not participate in Church ceremonies



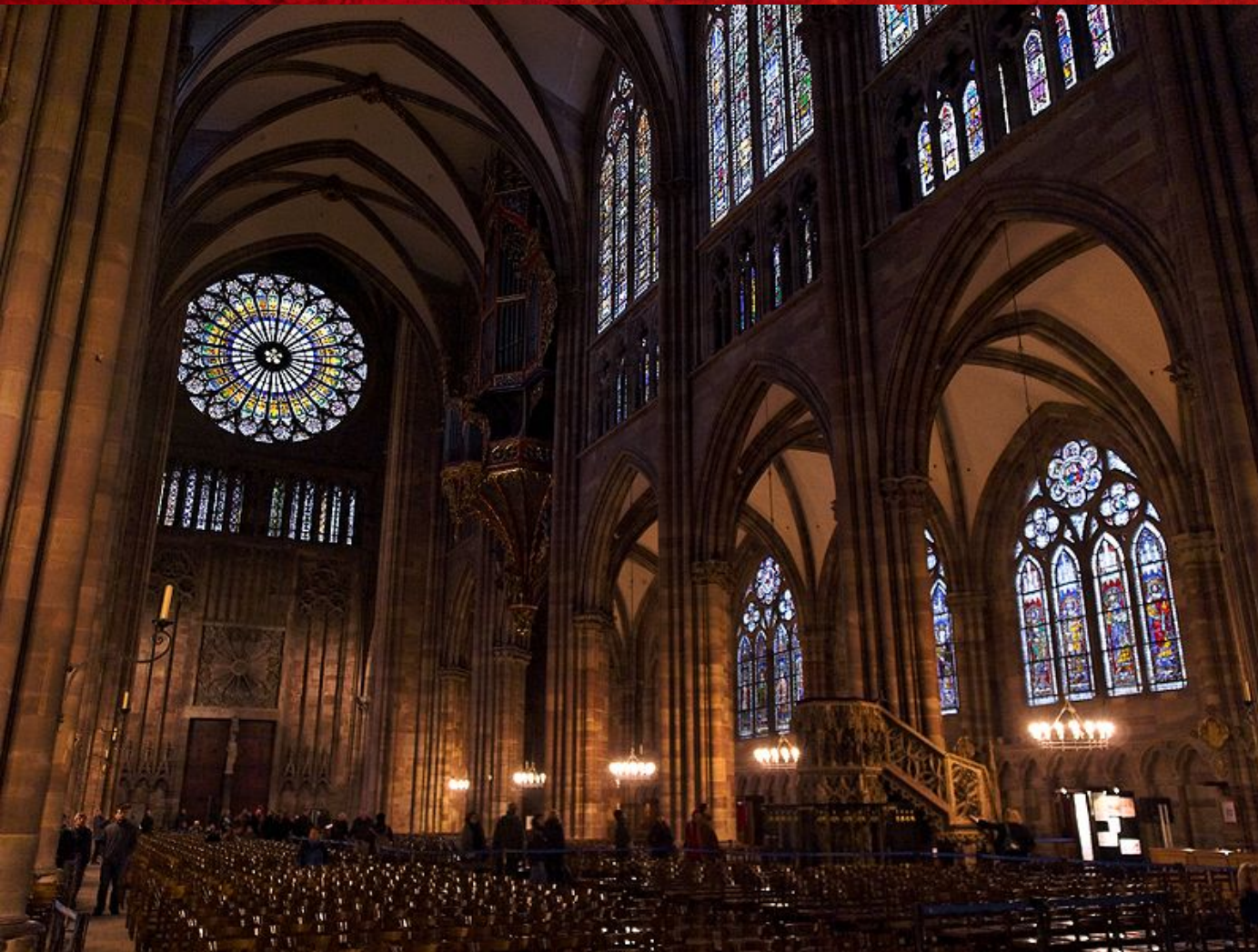
- Churches got their money from a tax on villagers called a *tithe*
- The *tithe* was about 10% of a person's wages and everybody was expected to pay



- Some churches became very rich because they owned land or collected tithes from wealthy towns and villages



- Some Church leaders even became rich by keeping the money for themselves



- The Church also supported people in need and performed marriages, burials, etc.



3. Monastic Life

- Many men and women became monks and nuns
- Monks lived in monasteries and women lived in convents



- Monks and nuns lived a life of work and prayer
- They often took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience



- They were also often separated from the rest of society



- Nuns and monks had to pray several times a day, including waking up in the middle of the night to pray
- There were few comforts for these monks and nuns



- Nevertheless, there were never a shortage of applicants to monasteries and convents



Homework

- We know that it was very hard work being a monk or nun, and the rewards were very few. Why do you think so many people chose to live in monasteries and convents?

