

U N I T 7

FEUDAL SOCIETY AND THE MIDDLE AGES.

1-WHAT WAS FEUDALISM? :

Feudalism was a Medieval system based on the exchange of land for military service.

The word "feudalism" comes from "feud" (or **fief**). This is the extension of land which belonged to a king or a noble, **the feudal lord**, who would cede it to another noble, who became his **vassal**.



The fief, or land, was usually granted following a **Commendation Ceremony** in which the vassal swore loyalty to his lord. Apart from this loyalty, he owed his lord advice and military service.



2-FEUDAL SOCIETY:



Feudalism, in the Middle Ages, represents a pyramid. The KING is at the top of this pyramid. He governed by Divine Right and he is considered *primus inter pares* (first among equals).

Nevertheless, society was divided into three orders:

a) **-NOBILITY-**: They were privileged members. Nobles belonged to two different classes:

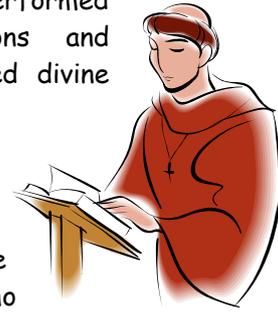
-Upper Nobility: They had a title (duke, count, earl or marquis). They possessed vast estates and enjoyed the favor of the king.

-Lesser Nobility: They didn't have a title (anything other than "sir"), and they usually didn't have any land. They didn't usually come from a noble family, but they had married a noble person.

Nobles, lords and their vassals defended themselves from enemies, and fought in wars.



b) **-CLERGY:** They were privileged like the nobles. They performed religious services (baptisms, marriages, confessions and communions), administered divine justice, and mediated divine protection.



The Clergy consisted of:

- **Secular clergy:** They were independent, and didn't follow the rules of a religious order. They were **BISHOPS**, who might be the son of a nobleman and wealthy and powerful and the **PRIESTS** who administered sacraments. They had a high range of social standing.

- **Regular clergy:** They followed the rules of a religious order and lived in communities such as monasteries or abbeys. They were **ABBOTS** who governed a monastery. The abbots were in charge of the **MONKS**, worked the land of the monastery and took a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The Clergy had an important task in the monasteries. The monastery was the centre of learning and culture. Monks taught people how to read and write.



c) **-PEASANTS:** They were 90 percent of society. They were not privileged . The peasants could be free (**VILLEINS**) and have their own land , or not be free (**SERFS**) and linked to the land of the lord.

Peasants had a very hard life. They worked for free on the land, paid the lord to use the services of the fief like the mill, the bakery oven, the bridge, the wine press, and they had to use rudimentary tools to farm.

