FEUDALISM: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM OF THE MIDDLE AGES

LESSON ESSENTIAL QUESTION: BASED ON POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS, WHAT TITLE CAN BE USED TO REDEFINE THE MIDDLE AGES?

Historical Background:
The basic economic unit of Medieval Europe was manoralism. A Lord received a piece of land, usually from the king. When he received the land, he also received all that was on it. That means that most of the people that lived on the land also belonged to the nobleman. The people, peasants, had to pay to the lord, or they had to work for him. This way, the nobleman could live and support his family from what he received from the peasants. He had also certain legal powers, like that of a police force. The peasants were subjects which had to pay tribute to the lord. In return they received protection.

DOCUMENT 1: THE FEUDAL LADDER

DOCUMENT 2: THE MEDIEVAL MANOR
### DOCUMENT 3: FEUDAL OATHS OF FIDELITY

“Thus shall one vassal take the oath of fidelity:
By the Lord before whom this sanctuary is holy, I will to him be true and faithful, and love all which he loves and shun all which he shuns, according to the laws of God and the order of the world. Nor will I ever with will or action, through word or deed, do anything which is unpleasing to him, on condition that he will hold to me as I shall deserve it, and that he will perform everything as it was in our agreement when I submitted myself to him and chose his will.

Thus shall one lord agree that,
It is right that those who offer to us unbroken fidelity should be protected by our aid. And since such and such a faithful one of ours, by the favor of God, coming here in our palace with his arms, has seen fit to swear trust and fidelity to us in our hand, therefore we decree and command by the present precept that for the future such and such above mentioned be counted with the number of vassals. And if anyone perchance should presume to kill him, let him know that he will be judged guilty and forced to pay 600 shillings”

### DOCUMENT 4: A DESCRIPTION OF A MANOR IN THE 12TH CENTURY

“In Werminton are 7 hides1 at the taxation of the king. And of this land 20 full serfs and 29 half-serfs hold 34 virgates2 and a half; and for these the full serfs work 3 days a week through the year; and the half tenants as much as corresponds to their tenancies. And all these men have 16 plows, and they plow 68 acres and a half, and besides this they do 3 days work with their plows, and they ought to bring from the woods 34 wagon loads of wood. And all these men pay 4£. 11s. 4d. And to the love feast of St. Peter 10 rams and 400 loaves and 40 platters and 34 hens and 260 eggs. And there are 8 socmen who have 6 plows. In the demesne of the court are 4 plows of 32 oxen, and 9 cows and 5 calves, and 1 riding horse and 129 sheep and 61 swine and 1 draught-horse and 1 colt. And there is 1 mill with 1 virgate of land and 6 acres which pays 60s. and 500 eels. And Ascelin the clerk holds the church, with 2 virgates of land, from the altar of St. Peter of Borough. Robert, son of Richard, has 2 virgates and a half. In this vill 100 sheep can be placed.”

1Hide: a former measure of land used in England, equal to between 60 and 120 acres
2Virgates: unit of land area equal to about one quarter of a hide or 30 acres

### DOCUMENT 5: A FEUDAL CONTRACT (1307)

“John of Cayworth [serf] holds from his lord one house and thirty acres of land. For his right to this land, he must pay the lord two shillings a year at Easter and Michaelmas. At Christmas he must give the lord one cock and two hens worth four shillings.

He must harrow [cultivate] the lord's land for two days during Lent at sowing time with his own horse and harrow. He receives from the lord each day that he harrows three meals.

He must carry the manure of the lord's animals for two days using his own two oxen. He receives from the lord three meals each day that he carries the manure.”
He must carry wood from the lord's forest to the manor house for two days in summer. He receives from the lord three meals each day that he carries wood.

John of Cayworth may not allow his daughters to marry without the consent of the lord or the lord's bailiff. Neither may he permit his sons to enter the clergy without the lord's consent. He may not cut the timber growing on his land without the consent of his lord or the bailiff, and then only for the purpose of building.

After his death, his survivors will pay to the lord the best animal that he had, unless he has no living beast, and then the lord will receive no payment.

And if his sons or daughters wish to continue holding his house and thirty acres after his death, they must make a payment to the lord equal to the entire rent for one year, and continue paying the rent as set down in this contract."

"He caused castles to be built and oppressed the poor. The king was very hard, and he took from his subjects many marks of gold, and many hundred pounds of silver, and this, either with or without right, and with little need. He was given to avarice and greedily loved gain. He made large forests for the deer, and enacted laws there with, so that whoever killed a heart or a hind should be blinded. As he forbade killing the deer, so also the boars; and he loved the tall stags as if he were their father. He also commanded concerning the hares, that they should go free.

The rich complained and the poor murmured, but he was so sturdy that he took no notice of them; they must will all that the king willed, if they would live, or keep their lands"

The Magna Carta was signed in June 1215 between the barons of Medieval England and King John. 'Magna Carta' is Latin and means "Great Charter". It was one of the most important documents of the Middle Ages. It was signed between the feudal barons and King John. The document was a series of written promises between the king and his subjects that he, the king, would govern England and deal with its people according to the customs of feudal law. The goal of the document was to stop feudal kings from abusing their power at the expense of their subjects. Traditionally, the king had always consulted the barons before raising taxes and demanding more men for military service. This was all part of the Feudal System. As long as the king was militarily successful, his relationship with the barons was mostly good. King John, however, was not very successful in his military campaigns. This did not stop his constant demands for more money and more soldiers. This angered the barons. By 1204, John had lost all of northern France. In response to this, John introduced high taxes without asking the barons. This was against feudal law and accepted custom. The barons decided enough was enough. They rebelled against King John and captured London. Faced with the rebellion John decided to negotiate.

TO ALL FREE MEN OF OUR KINGDOM we have also granted, for us and our heirs forever, all the liberties written out below, to have and to keep for them and their heirs, of us and our heirs:

(12) No 'scutage' or 'aid' may be levied in our kingdom without its general consent, unless it is by the common council.

(13) The city of London shall enjoy all its ancient liberties and free customs, both by land and by water. We also will and grant that all other cities, boroughs, towns, and ports shall enjoy all their liberties and free customs.

(20) A freeman shall not be amerced for a slight offense, except in accordance with the degree of the offense; and for a grave offense he shall be amerced in accordance with the gravity of the offense...

(28) No constable or other royal official shall take corn or other movable goods from any man without immediate payment, unless the seller voluntarily offers postponement of this
The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth; for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself are called gods...In the Scriptures kings are called gods, and so their power after a certain relation compared to the divine power. Kings are also compared to fathers of families: for a king is truly...the father of his people...Kings are justly called gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth: for if you will consider the attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God hath power to create or destroy make or unmake at his pleasure, to give life or send death, to judge all and to be judged nor accountable to none; to raise low things and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both souls and body due. And the like power have kings: they make and unmake their subjects, they have power of raising and casting down, of life and of death, judges over all their subjects and in all causes and yet accountable to none but God only....

I conclude then this point touching the power of kings with this axiom of divinity, That as to dispute what God may do is blasphemy....so is it sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power...I will not be content that my power be disputed upon...I would wish you to be careful to avoid three things in the matter of grievances: First, that you do not meddle with the main points of government; that is my craft...Secondly, I would not have you meddle with such ancient rights of mine as I have received from my predecessors ...And lastly, I pray you beware to exhibit for grievance anything that is established by a settled law"
PAPAL SUPREMACY

Most Europeans were Christians and were born into the Roman Catholic Church. The Christian Church was structured into a hierarchy with the Pope at the head of the entire Church structure. Popes has always held important and influential roles, however as the Middle Ages progressed they became even more powerful. Several Popes attempted to turn the papacy into a monarchy so that the Pope would rule over not only the Church, but secular kings as well. The Popes of this time period claimed that they had the right to rule over all Christian people, holding the highest authority in the land second only to God himself.

The first step that was taken to establish the rule over all Christians was to remove secular authorities from having any influence upon the Christian Church official appointments. Previously kings and princes determined what individuals would be appointed to Church offices. This gave the kings and princes an influence over the actions and decisions of the Church, as the appointed officials had an obligation to please the kings. In 1509, the College of Cardinals ended this practice by allowing only select individuals within the Church to appoint other officials.

Papal power continued to increase under Pope Gregory VII. Pope Gregory believed that the Roman Catholic Church was the sole representative of God and that it was the Church’s authority to lead the Christian community. He argued that the Pope had the power to depose secular rulers if they did not follow the Papal rules. Gregory enacted a series of Church reforms that were intended to distance Church power from secular influence. One reform he enacted was celibacy on the clergy, denying priests the right to marry. This act ended and further prevented any marriages that were intended to create an alliance between the Church and a secular ruler.

The drive for papal power had an important result. By eliminating the practice of allowing secular rulers to appoint church officials, the popes insured the independence of the church as an institution. In this way, the popes unintentionally helped to create the principle of the separation of church and state.

DOCUMENT 10: EXCERPT FROM LETTER WRITTEN BY POPE INNOCENT III (1198)

"The Creator set up two great lights in the heavens; the greater light to rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night. In the same way, the Church has set up two great lights on earth; the greater light, being the Pope, to rule over souls; the lesser light, being the king, to rule over bodies. Just as the moon’s light
comes from the sun, does the power of the king come from the Pope. The more closely a king is willing to follow the Pope’s rule, the greater his light will be.”

~ Pope Innocent III, 1198

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<th>DOCUMENT 12: DICTATUS PAPAE, POPE GREGORY VII (1075)</th>
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<td>1. That the Roman Church was established by God alone</td>
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<td>2. That the Roman pontiff alone is rightly called universal</td>
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<td>3. That he has the power alone to depose and reinstate bishops</td>
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<td>4. That he has the power to depose emperors</td>
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<td>5. That his decree can be annulled [made void] by no one, and that he can annul the decrees of anyone</td>
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<td>6. That he can be judged by no one</td>
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<td>7. That the Roman Church has never erred and will never err to all eternity, according to the testimony of the holy scriptures</td>
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<td>8. That by his command or permission subjects may accuse their rulers</td>
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<td>9. That no one can be regarded as Catholic who does not agree with the Roman Church</td>
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<td>10. That he has the power to release subjects from their oaths of fidelity to wicked rulers</td>
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Religion offered comfort to the faithful, but it also injected a powerful sense of fear into everyday life. The common conception of God was one of a vengeful, all-powerful, all-knowing being, an image that fostered a pervasive sense of fear and foreboding. He controlled life from moment to moment: everything that happened, from the most ordinary events to the epic, were signs of his work. The belief that an external force controlled daily life contributed to a kind of collective paranoia. As a result the common person was concerned with maintaining a strong relationship with God and the Church so that he or she could achieve eternal salvation. Aside from guiding the spiritual aspect of people’s lives, the Church regulated a system of justice. Canon law (the law of the Church) applied to all Christians during the Middle Ages. Courts were established to hear cases and punishments were awarded. The harshest punishment an individual could receive was excommunication and interdict. To be excommunicated meant that an individual was banished from the Church, thus meaning the individual is denied salvation. For political leaders who continued to disobey the Church the pope would declare an interdict. This meant that the sacraments and religious services could not be performed in the king’s land, thus the entire kingdom would be denied salvation and would be doomed to eternal suffering. The thought of these punishments allowed the Church to wield power over all political leaders of the Middle Ages.

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<th>DOCUMENT 13: POPE GREGORY VII'S FIRST EXCOMMUNICATION OF KING HENRY IV (1076)</th>
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<td>&quot;Confident of my integrity and authority, I now declare in the name of omnipotent God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that Henry, son of the emperor Henry, is deprived of his kingdom of Germany and Italy; I do this by your authority and in defense of the honor of your church, because he has rebelled against it. He who attempts to destroy the honor of the Church should be deprived of such honor as he may have held. He has refused to obey as a Christian should, he has not returned to God from whom he had wandered, he has had dealings with excommunicated persons, he has done many iniquities, he has despised the warnings which, as you are witness, I sent to him for his salvation, he has cut himself off from your Church, and has attempted to rend it asunder; therefore, by your authority, I place him under the curse. It is in your name that I curse him, that all people may know that you are Peter, and upon your rock the Son of the living God has built his Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.&quot;</td>
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