Land and Loyalty

Social roles and obligations in medieval western Europe

9-12.WC.21 "Describe the orders of medieval social hierarchy, the changing role of the Church, the emergence of feudalism and the development of feudal obligations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the three social orders in paragraph 1; in paragraph 2, circle what a lord could give a vassal and box what the vassal promised; in paragraph 3, underline two ways Church leaders gained local power.

A Manor Around the Year 1000

1. Imagine standing outside a manor in western Europe around the year 1000. A monk walks toward a church, an armed rider heads for a castle, and farmers carry grain from nearby fields. Medieval writers sometimes described society as three orders: those who prayed, those who fought, and those who worked. This was an idealized picture, not a complete list of jobs or a fixed rank for every person. Still, it showed a common claim: religious people offered spiritual care, warriors offered defense, and farmers supplied food. Most people worked the land, including free peasants and serfs with restricted freedom.

2. After the breakup of Charlemagne's empire, raids and weak central rule made protection a pressing local need in many regions. Powerful landholders gathered fighters and formed personal agreements. A lord might grant a vassal control of land, called a fief, or provide other support; the vassal promised loyalty, military service, and counsel. Such ties helped rulers and nobles organize defense, but they varied by place and time. Farming families made different arrangements. Some serfs owed a landholding lord labor and payments in exchange for access to farmland and protection. They were not automatically vassals, and their obligations could limit where they lived.

3. In the early Middle Ages, the western Church linked communities when many royal governments could not reach them regularly. Clergy led worship, kept written records, and offered care to people in need. Over time, some bishops and abbots gained estates from rulers and nobles, collected income from those lands, and exercised local authority. A monastery could thus feed travelers and preserve manuscripts while also overseeing farms. Church leaders were not simply outside the network of land and obligations; some took part in it. Their growing wealth and influence could bring disputes with secular rulers over who appointed bishops and controlled church lands.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the three orders depend on one another, according to the ideal described in paragraph 1?

2. What conditions encouraged landholders to form agreements with fighters, and how could those agreements help?

3. How did a vassal's obligations to a lord differ from the obligations some serfs had to a landholding lord?

4. How did some Church leaders' roles expand beyond worship, and what conflict could result?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a short account of a fictional village in western Europe around the year 1000 facing raids. Explain distinct exchanges involving a landholding lord, a vassal, and a farming family, and show how a monastery might gain a role beyond worship.

ANSWER KEY

Land and Loyalty

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the three social orders in paragraph 1; in paragraph 2, circle what a lord could give a vassal and box what the vassal promised; in paragraph 3, underline two ways Church leaders gained local power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the three orders depend on one another, according to the ideal described in paragraph 1?	**Religious people offered spiritual care, warriors offered defense, and farmers supplied the food the others needed.**
2	What conditions encouraged landholders to form agreements with fighters, and how could those agreements help?	**Raids and weak central rule increased the need for local protection. Agreements secured fighters' loyalty and service, helping organize defense.**
3	How did a vassal's obligations to a lord differ from the obligations some serfs had to a landholding lord?	**A vassal promised loyalty, military service, and counsel in return for land or other support. Some serfs owed labor and payments in return for access to farmland and protection.**
4	How did some Church leaders' roles expand beyond worship, and what conflict could result?	**Some bishops and abbots held estates, collected income, and exercised local authority. Their power could cause disputes with secular rulers over bishop appointments and church lands.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When raiders approached Alderford, its lord granted a mounted fighter use of a field. The fighter became his vassal and promised to guard the road and advise him. A farming family was not part of that agreement: it worked a plot and spent two days each week on the lord's fields in return for farmland and shelter behind his walls. The lord also gave an orchard to the monastery. Its abbot used the harvest to feed travelers and began judging disputes over orchard boundaries, gaining authority as well as wealth.

Accept historically plausible variations in local obligations. Look for a clear distinction between a vassal's agreement and a farming family's arrangement, plus a monastery role beyond worship.