

II.2.b
Religious
Order

The Religious Order

Ecclesiastical reputation

The church was largely in ill repute. Among other reasons for this sad state were the moral excesses and civil abuses of the clergy, the failure of the Roman leaders to act as a spiritual force, and the division and factionalism in the Roman church itself. By 1500 the church was, in the public image, at a low ebb although terms of finance, office, and political imagery showed it to be doing well. Flick, THE DECLINE OF THE MEDIAEVAL CHURCH, has offered these reasons for the loss of church influence and respect:

II.2.b.
Ecclesiastical
Reputation

Within the church

--the formal nature of sacerdotal worship was not understood nor appreciated by the masses

--there was a loss of step with the world and the church was not contemporary

--the immorality of the clergy was to the public a testimonial of error

--the concentration of power in ecclesiastical offices produced rivals within the church that used the public image almost like a "pawn" force and tended to deny self-respect.

Without the Church

--a renewed, growing skepticism

--a developing nationalism that spoke against lines of compromise or interchange

--some growing intellectual ideas that balked at the superstition of the previous age

--a changing economic structure that could no longer afford the "cost" of the hierarchical order.

Whether these reasons are fully correct or not, and whether they are sufficiently complete, they still tell a good bit about the situation. There is, or course, a great gulf between the way in which the church saw herself in those days and the way in which she was seen by the general public.