

--monastic orders were often more like societies within a society than being the arms of a central agency.

the lack of absolutism such as will be seen in later ages. A monk might be a heretic in one place and a hero in the next before the reformation changes.

Politically the church saw itself as the fulfillment of Augustine's City of God. It was the idea of a church-kingdom and was productive of a "heaven on earth" spiritual society. It was in this light that the pontiffs had been able to proclaim themselves as being superior to kings, princes, etc.

The church had great land holdings, both by gift, legacy, acquisition through purchase, etc. These possessions tended to make it a very exercised political power. Revenues were gleaned from the land and a sort of ecclesiastical tax system was in vogue. The church tended to feed itself from these holdings and politically this gave it rivalry with the state and even the common citizen. Local bishoprics were often thought of in terms of economic value.

Benefices (church positions in the pastoral realm) were bought and sold. Being able to buy and sell the various offices made a deteriorating condition of morals and morality. The bishoprics, as noted in the foregoing paragraph, were often evaluated in the light of the living (money) they would produce. If a parish offered a good living, there might be extensive bidding for it in the hope of improvement in life. To gain a benefice that gave increased income, the purchaser would bargain with the officers who were his superiors and a part of his increase would become theirs. Some parishes were selected in the intent of improving the living and very poor parishes got either very poor men or those who cared nothing for earthly goods and there were some of these, although they were not common. Understanding this system helps one see why men who had no religious principle or scruple were often found in the church and often sought the higher offices all the way to the papacy. Sadly, in this profit motivated realm, true piety seemed to offer no potential for success or advancement.

Socially the church was not held in high esteem. It had failed to help the poor and could