

Church and Society in Western Europe**Lesson 3**

Changes in Medieval Society

Key Terms and People

three-field system farmland divided into three equal-sized fields in which crops were rotated

guild an organization working to get the best prices or working conditions

Commercial Revolution the expansion of trade and changes in business practices

burgher merchant-class person who lived in a town

vernacular everyday language

Thomas Aquinas scholar who argued that the most basic religious truths could be proved by sound reasoning

scholastics scholars who gathered and taught at universities

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about the Crusades.

In this lesson, you will read about the rise of towns and trade.

As You Read

Use a diagram to identify changes in medieval society.

A GROWING FOOD SUPPLY**Why did the food supply increase?**

The climate in Europe became warmer between 800 and 1200. This helped farming. Horses starting pulling plows and did twice the work of oxen.

Farmers also used a new method of rotating the crops planted in an area. They planted two-thirds of their fields, leaving one-third unplanted. This **three-field system** helped farmers grow more food.

1. Give three reasons why the food supply increased.

THE GUILDS**What were the guilds?**

Changes in the way goods were produced and sold happened in the medieval period. Merchants banded together in an organization called a **guild**. A merchant guild worked to get the best prices for their goods.

Craft guilds were made up of groups of workers who did the same job. These included bakers, tailors, and glassmakers. Members set standards and prices for their products. They also made rules for young people learning the craft.

Lesson 3, *continued*

2. What were the two kinds of guilds?

4. Why did peasants move to the towns?

COMMERCIAL REVOLUTION**Why did trade and finance increase?**

Along with the growth in the food supply, trade and finance increased. Craft workers began to make more goods. These goods were traded all over Europe. Towns held fairs each year. There merchants sold cloth, food, leather, and other wares.

With more trade, merchants needed more cash. They needed new ways to get cash and loans and to exchange different types of money. The Church had rules against charging a fee for loaning money. Later, the Church relaxed its rules. Then Christians began to form banks. The expansion of trade and changes in banking practices was called the **Commercial Revolution**.

3. How did ways of doing business change?

URBAN LIFE FLOURISHES**Why did towns grow larger?**

In the early 1100s, the population of western Europe grew quickly. Trade was booming. Towns grew larger and more important. Towns were dirty places with narrow streets. Wooden houses in the towns were fire hazards.

Many peasants fled to the towns. After living there a year and a day, they became free. Other town dwellers, known as **burghers**, organized themselves. The burghers were of the merchant class. They demanded more rights for town dwellers.

THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING**Why did learning spread?**

Growing trade and wealth helped lead to a growing interest in education. New centers of learning arose in Europe. They were called universities.

At this time, most writers were still using Latin. However, some began to use the **vernacular**. This was their native, everyday language. Dante Alighieri wrote *The Divine Comedy* in Italian. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in English. These writers brought literature to many people who could not read Latin.

During the Crusades, contact with Muslims helped increase learning. Muslim scholars had preserved books from ancient Rome and Greece. These works then became available in Europe.

Ancient writings influenced Christian thinkers, such as **Thomas Aquinas**. He reasoned that the most basic religious truths could be proved by logic. Aquinas and his fellow scholars met at the great universities. They were known as schoolmen, or **scholastics**.

5. How did the use of the vernacular help spread learning?

Lesson 3, *continued*

As you read this lesson, make notes in the chart to explain the results of each change or trend in medieval society.

1. Farmers began using a new type of harness that fitted across a horse's chest.	→	
2. Using the three-field system, farmers began to grow crops on two-thirds of their land each year, rather than half.	→	
3. Merchant and craft guilds organized and changed ways to do business.	→	
4. The Commercial Revolution changed trade and banking practices.	→	
5. As trade blossomed and farming methods improved, the population of western Europe rose from around 30 million to about 42 million between 1000 and 1150.	→	
6. As people left life on the manor for life in towns, they challenged the traditional ways of feudal society in which everyone had a place.	→	
7. Authors began writing in the vernacular.	→	
8. Growing trade and growing cities brought a new interest in learning.	→	
9. Christian scholars from Europe visited Muslim libraries in Spain, and Jewish scholars translated Arabic copies of Greek writings into Latin.	→	