

the culture needed to progress to social stability. Feudalism developed over time and has been described as a body of institutions creating and regulating the obligation of obedience and service, mainly military service, on the part of a free man (the vassal) towards another free man (the lord), and the obligation and maintenance on the part of the lord with regard to his vassal (Abels, 2009). This social structure began developing in the ninth century and continued to provide the needed environment up until the middle of the fourteenth century, when it began to break down. The need for knights in shining armor and a castle for protection began to be replaced with muskets and cannons, with the invention of gun powder. Many of the people who had for generations been under the guidance of someone else began to feel a certain individualism of who they were, which was another reason that the Reformation would be able to tap into the hearts and minds of the people.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries brought their own challenges to the people, but as the fourteenth century arrived, the European population had reached its largest number of citizens up to that point in history. But that was to change quite rapidly as famine swept across the continent, killing up to ten percent of the population. Trade had greatly benefited the European Continent, but through these same ports would come a disease that would kill up to a third of the European citizens (Duncan, 2001). The pestilence became known as Black Death, and it would arrive on the docks of Italy by means of rats and fleas. It would quickly spread to all parts of the European Continent and then work its way to England as well. This disease would hit at random in the population, seeming to pick its victims indiscriminately, with no class of people being spared.

It shook to the foundation the certainty that medieval men and women had about how they understood the world. It turned their world upside down. They thought they understood the world, this hierarchical world where everything was in its place, this great chain of being that they understood and everything was ranked according to power and authority, and God rewarded those who were good and punished those who were bad. (Babcock, 2011, p. 173)

If you were a peasant during this time period your worldview was what you were told by the Church as well as the kings and lords. Where did God fit into the unstoppable death of their family, friends, and their children? This plague itself would put a large question mark in the minds of the people about the power and authority of the Catholic Church, which had no answers for them.

The fourteenth century was also a time of blooming for science as well as technology. One of the most influential scientists of this time period was Nicholas Copernicus. Many today give him full credit for the discovery of what is now known as the heliocentric system of the universe. He never actually advanced the theory that the earth was not the center of the universe; he believed that mathematical designs would be less complicated if one accepted the sun as a fixed point and based one's computations on a heliocentric arrangement.