**The Manorial System: Obligations and Allegiances**

* the most effective political organization was local.
* Manorialism, a system designed to establish communal agricultural activity,
* serfs, who farmed land belonging to lords in return for which the militarized aristocracy provided protection.
* In addition to their labor, serfs were required to pay a portion of their produce to their lords.
* Serfs retained ownership of their houses and could pass property on from one generation to another.
* Technology was limited and production was dependent on the number of man hours applied to the tasks of agricultural labor.

**Feudal Monarchies and Political Advances**

* A system of political and military relationships (**feudalism**) evolved in western Europe from the 6th century
* The lords provided protection to the **vassals** (lesser lords) in return for military and other service, with the elite affording horses and iron weapons
* Feudal relationships expanded from local to regional needs
* **William the Conqueror** invaded England and merged feudal techniques with a more central government, where royal sheriffs, officials supervised local justice

**The West’s Expansionist Impulse**

* Political and Economic changes spurred European expansion
* Small Christian states began reconquest of Iberian Peninsula from Muslims
* Vikings crossed Atlantic to Iceland, Greenland and Canada
* Pope **Urban II** called 1st Christian crusade in 1095, to seek salvation of Holy Land. Their presence helped expose Europeans to cultural and economic influences of Byzantium and Islam

**Religious Reform and Evolution**

* Catholic Church went through several periods of decline and renewal
* Wealth and power often led officials to become preoccupied with secular matters
* Pope **Gregory VII** stipulated priests remain unmarried and bishops not be appointed by the state to reduce interference
* Independent church courts ruled on religious concerns

**Western Culture in Postclassical Era**

* Christianity was a unifying force in western Europe
* Christianity changed as European society matured
* Theologians and artists developed distinctive expressions, and philosophical currents spread.

**Religious Themes in Art and Literature**

* Christian art and architecture reflected both popular and formal themes
* Paintings were dominated by religious themes, with early stiff and stylized figures replaced in the 14th century  by more realistic scenes
* Architecture followed Roman models until the 11th century when the **Gothic** style produced soaring spires and arched windows
* Writing dealt with philosophy, law, and politics

**Strains on Rural Life:**

* The more complex economy increased landlord-peasant tensions
* Noble landlords used trade to improve their life styles, and agricultural improvements allowed some peasants condition to improve
* There was recurring struggles between the two groups until the 19th century as peasants wanted more freedom and control of the land, while landlords wanted higher revenue

**Limited Sphere for Women**

* Complexity of social and economic life limited women’s roles
* Female monastic groups provided a limited alternative to marriage and family life
* Virgin Mary and other religious figures provided positive role models
* Even though less restrictive than Islam, women lost ground and were hemmed in by male dominated organizations by the close of the Middle Ages.

**The Postclassical West and It’s Heritage**

* Middle Ages often regarded as a backward period, but this ignores medieval creativity
* For the 1st time Europeans were building institutions and culture which lay the political a economic foundation for future Western civilization
* Also created an aggressive interest in the rest of the world