

*King Louis IX was born on April 25, 1214. He reigned as the King of France from November 8, 1226 until his death on August 25, 1270.*

King Louis IX of France, later Saint Louis, is a significant figure in history. Born in 1214, his reign is known for his dedication to Roman Christianity, involvement in the Crusades, and reforms in governance and law. His influence is evident in places named after him, like St. Louis, Missouri, and various 'San Luis' locations. Globally, many churches and institutions bear his name, indicating his enduring significance.

## FROM CHARLEMAGNE TO LOUIS IX

The period between Charlemagne and Louis IX saw shifts in power, cultural changes, and new societal structures. After Charlemagne's death in 814 AD, his empire splintered, leading to distinct kingdoms, including the Kingdom of France. This era saw a shift of power from emperors to local lords, marking the rise of feudalism.

Feudalism transformed social and political structures. Kings granted land, or fiefs, to noblemen who pledged loyalty and military services. These lords had their own vassals, knights who were given a part of the fief for their services. Serfs, peasants who worked the land, were at the bottom of the hierarchy. This system resulted in a mosaic of local territories with their own rulers.

The Church became a unifying force, often filling gaps left by weakening secular rulers. It played a key role in mediating disputes and maintaining social order. The period from the 9th to the 13th centuries saw the founding of universities and the growth of towns and trade.

The Capetian dynasty gained prominence in France, starting with Hugh Capet's reign in 987 AD. By 1226, when Louis IX became king, the Capetians had established themselves, ready to leave their mark on European history. The story of Louis IX is about a pivotal moment in a complex history, reflecting centuries of changes, challenges, and developments.

## INTRODUCTION: THE LIFE AND REIGN OF KING LOUIS IX

King Louis IX of France, born in 1214 and ascending the throne in 1226, left a significant legacy. His reign was characterized by devout piety, crusading zeal, and administrative reforms, impacting not just France but the broader European Christendom.

His profound commitment to Roman Christianity deeply influenced his decisions, policies, and the two crusades he led, despite their military failures. Louis IX wasn't just a king, but a moral guide for his people, seeking justice and equity through his reforms.

His influence can still be seen today, with cities and institutions worldwide bearing his name. This chapter aims to explore the life and reign of King Louis IX, providing a deeper understanding of the period's interplay of faith, power, and morality. His story holds continued relevance and inspiration in our modern world.

## PIETY AND DEVOTION: LOUIS IX'S PERSONAL FAITH

King Louis IX of France was renowned for his profound personal piety which deeply influenced his reign. Personal piety in the Middle Ages was a devout practice of religious rituals and beliefs, permeating daily life with a mystical approach to God.

Louis IX demonstrated his piety through strict adherence to Catholic practices, moral conduct, and compassion. He attended daily Mass, was devoted to prayer, and practiced penance, such as fasting and wearing hair shirts. He was known for his humility and commitment to justice, which led to significant reforms in the French legal system.

Contrasting Louis IX's piety with modern Christian practices reveals changes in religious observance. Contemporary Christianity often prioritizes personal belief and moral conduct over strict rituals. While modern Christians may attend church and pray regularly, intense medieval practices, like wearing hair shirts or extended fasting, are less common.

Louis IX's ascetic piety provides insight into the spiritual climate of the 13th century, blending personal devotion with public religious observance, reflecting the significant role of a monarch as a Christian leader.

## CRUSADING ZEAL: THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CRUSADES

King Louis IX's reign was distinguished by his active involvement in the Seventh and Eighth Crusades, reflecting the complex relationship between medieval Christianity, war, and Biblical norms.

### LOUIS IX AND THE SEVENTH CRUSADE (1248-1254)

In 1248, Louis IX launched the Seventh Crusade to reclaim the Holy Land. This crusade, sparked by Jerusalem's fall to Muslims in 1244, was a spiritual endeavor for Louis IX, seen as a way to atone for sins. Despite capturing the Egyptian city of Damietta, the crusade ended in failure with defeat at Mansurah and Louis' capture. Still, Louis stayed in the Holy Land for years, aiding the remaining Crusader states.

### THE EIGHTH CRUSADE AND LOUIS IX'S DEATH (1270)

The Eighth Crusade in 1270, Louis IX's last venture, aimed to convert the Tunisian emir and use Tunisia as a springboard to attack Egypt. However, disease crippled the Crusader army, and Louis IX died of dysentery, marking the end of an era in the Crusades and dampening European efforts in the Holy Land.

## THE CRUSADES: POINTING OUT THAT CHRISTIAN DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN CHRISTIAN

The Crusades, especially those led by Louis IX, underscore the medieval Church's theology where holy wars were venerated. The Church promised spiritual rewards, such as sin remission and eternal salvation, to participants. This prompts questions about the Church's Christian identity and the interpretation of European history as 'Christian' history. Louis IX, the ideal Christian warrior-king of his time, is viewed differently through modern Christian ethics.

## PATRONAGE OF RELIGIOUS ART AND ARCHITECTURE

King Louis IX was an arts patron, leaving a legacy of Gothic architecture and religious art that symbolized medieval France's piety and power. Under his reign, Paris witnessed the construction of the iconic Sainte-Chapelle, Notre Dame Cathedral extensions, and numerous Gothic churches across France.

Sainte-Chapelle, built in the 1240s to house holy relics, embodies Rayonnant Gothic architecture with its high ceilings and elaborate stained glass. Louis IX himself brought the relics to Paris, underscoring his direct participation in this landmark church's creation.

Religious art, like the Berthold Missal and mural paintings in the Sainte-Chapelle, also thrived under his patronage. Medieval religious art served to educate the illiterate, beautify worship places, and visually connect to the divine.

Today, religious art in Christianity has a different role, focusing more on the word and sermons than visual education. While still significant as cultural heritage, religious art and architecture of the medieval church played a more central role in religious practice that has lessened over time. Nonetheless, Louis IX's patronage created iconic landmarks that continue to inspire awe centuries later.

## JUSTICE AND GOVERNANCE: THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

King Louis IX revolutionized France's legal system to reflect justice, equity, and the protection of the vulnerable. He established the Parlement of Paris, a key appellate court that standardized French law and set legal precedents.

Louis IX introduced due process, instituting the presumption of innocence, abolishing trial by ordeal, and advocating for rational investigation. He also protected peasants and serfs from exploitation, prohibiting seizures of their property.

His hands-on approach to justice, including personal involvement in arbitration, symbolized his accessibility. Louis IX's laws were a blend of his pious worldview and contemporary governance trends, leading to a more progressive system. His legal reforms have left a lasting impact on modern judicial processes worldwide.

## THE INQUISITION AND RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY

King Louis IX's quest for religious orthodoxy led to the establishment of the Inquisition and the persecution of deemed heretics in France. Pope Gregory IX authorized the Inquisition in 1234, which Louis IX supported to bolster Catholic dominance. His reign saw aggressive efforts to eliminate dissent.

Jews faced persecution under Louis IX, with prohibitions on the Talmud and restrictions on money-lending, reflecting antisemitic policies. Groups like the Waldensians, who advocated simplified Christian lifestyles, faced accusations of heresy and harsh punishments. Louis sought uniformity in Christian practices, favoring Roman orthodoxy.

This contrasts with today's religious freedom, as Christians now realize that persecuting heresy goes against individual faith values. Under Louis IX, many would have faced state persecution, reflecting that era's "Christianity."

While Louis IX aimed for pious kingship, his Inquisition support revealed his flawed vision. He aspired for an exemplary Christian society through reform and justice, but insisted on strict adherence to Catholic authority and doctrine.

How did Christianity evolve into a doctrine that, due to its distortions, strays so far from its origins that it's a stretch to call it Christianity? I believe it began with the dismissal of Paul and the revelation of the mystery of grace's dispensation. This dispensation is **not** a Kingdom dispensation, and those who study God's word by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) distinguish the **kingdom** from the Body of Christ so completely that a follower of Paul (1 Cor. 11:1) would never have conceived the "kingdom of God on earth" version of Christianity seen in Louis IX's era.

## DIPLOMACY AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS: LOUIS IX'S ENCOUNTERS WITH MUSLIMS AND MONGOLS

King Louis IX's reign interacted significantly with the Muslim and Mongol world, reflecting the medieval interfaith dynamics. His relations with Muslims, influenced by the Crusades, involved diplomatic dealings including negotiations with the Egyptian Sultanate, despite the ongoing conflict over the Holy Land.

His diplomacy extended to the Mongol Empire, sending emissaries and receiving ambassadors, perceiving potential allies against Muslims. However, a Franco-Mongol alliance didn't materialize due to the Mongols' own interests and alliances.

Louis IX's diplomacy demonstrates his pragmatic approach to non-Christian powers, engaging with Muslim and Mongol rulers for strategic advantages. However, his ultimate goal was to advance Christian interests and recover the Holy Land, highlighting the complex nature of medieval Christian attitudes towards non-Christians.

## CHARITY AND CARE FOR THE POOR

King Louis IX was renowned for his groundbreaking acts of charity. Frequently inviting the poor to his home and establishing hospitals, such as the famous Quinze-Vingts, he set a precedent for royal social welfare. His personal compassion extended to visits to the sick, including lepers, demonstrating his Christian ethics and duty to alleviate suffering. Louis IX's initiatives were

pioneering, setting him apart from his royal contemporaries and leaving a lasting impact on France. His actions might have established a state-provided welfare system, a precedent that endures in modern Europe's healthcare provision.

## CANONIZATION AND VENERATION AS A SAINT

Canonization in the Roman Catholic Church involves a thorough examination of a candidate's life, work, and miracles. Louis IX's canonization, intertwined with his political and religious legacy, made him the only French king declared a saint by Pope Boniface VIII in 1297. His piety, acts of charity, and promotion of Catholic orthodoxy largely contributed to this.

Miraculous healings and divine interventions attributed to Louis IX were key in his canonization. His devoutness, and the kingdom's need for such a king, influenced the Papacy to elevate him into a virtuous icon.

In medieval Christianity, saints were models of Christian virtues, their lives offering faith lessons. Relics associated with saints were venerated, and miracles attributed to these relics were seen as divine favor signs. Louis IX's saintly status reinforced the Capetian dynasty's divine right, infusing the French monarchy with sanctity.

King Louis IX's canonization solidified his image as a model Christian monarch, his veneration reflecting his enduring influence on French history and Christianity.

## LEGACY AND INFLUENCE: KING LOUIS IX IN HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

King Louis IX significantly influenced French history and Christianity. His pious and astute reign shaped France's national identity and his sanctity continues to be a source of national pride. His influence is seen in many places named after him and his status as a symbol of French monarchy.

His reign influenced future Christian leaders and European politics. His model of kingship, legal reforms, and establishment of the Inquisition in France were pivotal in shaping European governance and the Church's role. His participation in the Crusades influenced Christian-Muslim relations.

Though venerated as a saint, his reign was marked by contrasts including deep piety and religious intolerance, commitment to justice and brutal suppression of heresy.

## CONCLUSION: A RIGHT DIVIDER'S VIEW

King Louis IX's reign offers insight into the interplay of faith, power, and the evolution of Christianity. He was a deeply pious king, serving the Church and embodying Christian monarchy. However, his practices contrast with Pauline Christianity, which favors grace through faith over penance or good works.

Louis IX's piety was linked with his royal power and the institutional Church, leading Crusades, supporting the Inquisition, and enforcing religious orthodoxy. These actions, while faith-driven, clash with Pauline Christianity's core principle of grace through belief.

He was a model king of Christendom, but this should not be conflated with being a model of biblical Christianity. His reign allows us to explore the complexities of faith, power, and Christian thought's evolution.

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In the next session, we'll study Queen Isabella I of Castile, noted for ending the Reconquista and sponsoring voyages spreading Christianity to the Americas. We'll examine the religious and geopolitical shifts during her reign and her faith-driven actions' lasting impacts.