

## H-O-H Socratic Seminar Document Packet: “Feudalism – Creating a More Stable Europe?”

<b>Questions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the author’s conclusion that “no price was too high when the future of Europe was at stake” an historical conclusion (Does the author’s position as an historian make this conclusion more valid?)</li> <li>▪ Is it the job of the historian to make such judgments? Why or why not?</li> </ul>
-------------------	---

### Document #1

In the midst of all the treason and selfishness, the wars, murders, and rebellions of the dismal age . . . there is one thought only that can afford the student any consolation. After the break-up of the empire of Charles the Great, while Dane, Saracen, Hungarian, and Slave were simultaneously besetting(attacking) the gates of Christendom, there was a very serious danger that the fabric of civilized Europe might crumble to pieces beneath their blows. That it did not do so must be attributed to the unexpected powers of resistance developed . . . under the feudal system. Disastrous as were most of the effects of that system, it at least justified its existence by saving Christendom from the foe without. What the successors of Charles the Great had failed to do when all the military force of the empire was at their backs was accomplished by the petty counts and margraves whose power was developed on the ruins of the central authority. It was the armed feudal horseman, and the impregnable walls of the feudal castle that foiled the attacks of the Dane, the Saracen, and the Hungarian...Europe lapsed, indeed, into utter decentralization. . . It was not without justice that the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries have been called 'the Dark Ages' .the remains of the old Teutonic(German) liberty finally disappear as feudalism is perfected, and the freeman becomes everywhere the vassal of some greater or smaller lord. But all the details of this unhappy change must not blind us to the fact that Christendom was saved from destruction by the men of the feudal age. . .The military triumph was a political disaster. At a moment when the kingly power was shaken by the unhappy civil wars of the descendants of Charles the Great, when almost every province was disputed . . . it was absolutely fatal that the control of the warlike strength of Europe should pass into( the hands of . . . petty magnates(nobles) . . . that price at which Christendom bought its safety was enormous: nevertheless no price was too high when the future of Europe was at stake. Any ransom was worth paying, if thereby Rome was saved from the Saracen, Mainz from the Magyar.. Paris from the heathen of the North.

**SECONDARY SOURCE:** Charles Oman, *The Dark Ages*. London Rivingtons Brothers Limited 1923, 511-14.

<b>Question:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Why does the author feel that as a political system, feudalism failed to bring order to Western Europe?</li> </ul>
<b>Document #2</b>	
<p>The feudal relationship was essentially a contract between lord and vassals which was defined and enforced by mutual agreement . . . It was assumed that lord and vassals had a common interest - the welfare of the fief. No lord was expected to make a serious decision, such as choosing a wife or going to war, without asking counsel of his vassals.</p> <p>As a political system pure feudalism was little removed from anarchy. It assumed a more-or-less permanent state of war. While it provided machinery for the peaceful settling of most disputes, it did not <i>compel</i> men to settle their disputes peacefully. Thus if two knights quarreled, they could always find a feudal court competent to hear the case, but if they preferred to wage war on each other, and they usually did, feudal custom did not hinder them. France in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, and parts of Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth, are prime examples of feudalism uncontrolled by public authority. In England from the beginning, in France after 1150A. D.... royal authority based on the traditions of Germanic monarchy, mingled vaguely with those of Imperial Rome(laws), curbed feudal anarchy to some extent.</p>	
<b>SECONDARY SOURCE:</b> Sidney Painter, <i>Feudalism and Liberty</i> , pg. 7.	

<b>Questions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How does Bryce Lyon view Painter's interpretation of feudalism and its effects on European politics?</li> <li>▪ Why does he disagree with historians that contend that feudalism created political disorder in Europe?</li> </ul>
<b>Document #3</b>	
<p>It is . . . [the works] of [Carl] Stephenson and Sidney Painter that best describe how feudalism provided a form of government for western Europe. They have shown feudalism as a useful and constructive political system. They believe that feudalism, rather than being a destructive political force breeding particularism [disunity] and anarchy, was a constructive and unifying system that made possible the political rehabilitation of western Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and that provided the conditions necessary for the formation of the strong centralized states that were England, France, Normandy and Flanders. Feudalism was the only military and political system possible in the eighth century. It provided the Carolingian rulers and their successors with the essential military and political services and was not responsible, as many historians have asserted, for the pulling-apart of the Carolingian Empire. That uncertain structure was doomed to failure by its size. . . Feudalism could operate effectively only within a small area. In a country like Flanders or in a compact kingdom like England the feudal rulers could make feudalism work. They could maintain the personal bond of loyalty inherent in vassalage and could force their vassals to perform feudal obligations .Scholarly opinion, it should be noted, now supports this thesis, that feudalism was a constructive and unifying political force. It is inaccurate to teach feudalism as an anarchical political system that contributed to the darkness of the early Middle Ages.</p>	
<b>SECONDARY SOURCE:</b> Bryce Lyon, <i>The Middle Ages in Recent Historical Thought</i> . Center for Teachers of Hist American Historical Association, Washington, D.C. 1959, 15.	