

**In Dei Nomine Amen: Medieval Ecclesiastical Administration  
The Northern Way:  
The Archbishops of York and the North of England, 1304-1405  
2020**

**Glossary**

See also definitions of Ecclesiastical Administrative Units, Offices and Orders, terms relating to Visitations etc., under the Subject Headings in the database [York Archbishops' Registers](#) and F.R.H. DuBoulay (ed.), *A Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms* (London, 1952).

**Medieval Ecclesiastical Personnel and Administrative Units:**

- **Bishop:** "A clergyman consecrated for the spiritual government and direction of a diocese, ranking beneath an archbishop ... and above the priests ... and deacons" (*OED*).
- **Diocese:** "The sphere of jurisdiction of a bishop; the district under the pastoral care of a bishop" (*OED*).
- **Archbishop:** "The chief bishop" (*OED*); "A bishop who, in addition to ordinary episcopal authority in his own diocese, usually has jurisdiction ... over the other bishops of a province" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).
- **Archdiocese:** "The see or jurisdiction of an archbishop" (*OED*).
- **Province:** "an area falling under the jurisdiction of an archbishop ... normally consisting of a number of dioceses" (*OED*).
- **See:** "The district under the jurisdiction of a bishop or archbishop; a diocese" (*OED*).
- **Archdeacon:** Originally a chief deacon assisting the bishop; then an official having wide powers in his area of responsibility, an **archdeaconry** (See *Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*).
- **Dean:** 1. Senior dignitary in cathedral; 2. Rural dean, "appointed to supervise discipline in a group of parishes formed by subdivisions of archdeaconries", that is, a **deanery** (*Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*).
- **Canon:** In cathedral churches, the canons, "with the dean at their head, constitute the body of resident ecclesiastical dignitaries, who manage the cathedral, and (formally) elect the bishop"; the dean and chapter (or canons) being the members of their business meetings (See *OED*).
- **Prebendary:** A priest, maintained by a 'prebend', an endowment in land or pension in money given to the cathedral or conventual church for that purpose (See *OED*).

**The Parish Church:**

- A **benefice** or living, with 'cure of souls' (care for the parishioners' souls) attached
- In the gift of a **patron** (individual or corporation), who had the **advowson** of the benefice, the right to present a suitable person to the bishop for:
- **Institution** to the benefice, becoming the **rector**
- **Induction** into corporal possession of the benefice, entitling the rector to receive the revenues
- If non-resident, the rector appointed a **vicar** to look after the cure of souls
- If the revenues were **appropriated** (transferred) to a religious house, that is, for example, an abbey or a priory, the incumbent was a vicar not a rector.

**Ordination:**

“The action of ordaining, or conferring holy orders; appointment or admission to the ministry of the Christian Church” (*OED*).

- **Holy Orders:** The higher grades of the Christian ministry (in ascending order): Sub-deacon, Deacon, Priest (*Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*).
- **Minor Orders:** The lower grades of the Christian ministry (in ascending order): Door-keeper, Reader, Exorcist, Acolyte (*Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*).

**Canon Law:**

“A body of Roman ecclesiastical law, relative to such matters as the church either has, or pretends to have, the proper jurisdiction over. This is compiled from the opinions of the ancient Latin fathers, the decrees of general councils, the decretal epistles and bulls of the Holy See” (*OED*, citing Blackstone).

**Sin:** “An act which is regarded as a transgression of the divine law and an offence against God; a violation (especially wilful or deliberate) of some religious or moral principle” (*OED*).

**Excommunication:**

- Imposed as a penalty for sin or wrongdoing; also the threat of excommunication often used to enforce an action: ‘under pain (or sentence) of excommunication’ if not carried out.
- **Greater:** exclusion from all communication with the church and its members (*OED*) (that is, exclusion from sacraments and society, that is, from all social activities, such as buying and selling; eating and drinking; prayer and greeting - “being sent to Coventry”).
- **Lesser:** exclusion from sacraments (See *OED*).

**Repentance:** repenting for whatever sin or wrongdoing had been committed to cause excommunication (See *OED*).

**Penance:** Generally “The undergoing of some penalty as an expression of sorrow for sin or wrongdoing; religious discipline, either imposed by ecclesiastical authority or voluntarily undertaken, as a token of repentance and as a means of satisfaction for sin” (*OED*).

**Absolution:** “Remission of sins declared officially by the priest” (*Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*).

**Testamentary business:**

- **Testament:** “The instrument or act by which a man bequeaths his movable goods and chattels” (*Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*) (in most circumstances, land could not be bequeathed until after the Statute of Wills, 1540, when it was possible to do so in a will).
- **Will or Last Will:** The instrument or act by which a man indicates to his executors how he wishes them to dispose of his lands/real estate (See *Handlist of Medieval Ecclesiastical Terms*). The terms ‘testament’ and ‘will’ may often be used interchangeably, even though technically, they refer to different things.