

East-West Conflicts and Schism

Eastern and Western Christians had been divided by language and culture since the time of Christ yet they remained united as a single Church for over 1000 years. The unified Church survived persecution, the fall of Rome, innumerable heresies, barbarian invasions, and Moslem conquests. Yet it divided permanently over what seemed at the time a minor squabble. How can this be explained?

The Schism of 1054 was not a sudden rupture, but the result of centuries of conflict. The immediate cause was not terribly serious and at the time of the schism many Christians assumed it would be temporary. The Crusades were called by the Pope with the hope of healing the rift but instead of improving relations, the influx of Latin Christians into Eastern territory exacerbated the conflict. And by 1204, when a Latin army sacked Constantinople, the divide was beyond repair.

Caesaropapism — An account of the "cause" of the east-west schism, often lists heresies and theological conflicts, as a source of the divide. However, the primary problems were political. Theological disputes that could have been resolved with good will were instead used as an excuse to persist in division. The source of the rupture was largely based on political rivalry and differences in doctrine (such as the Filioque controversy), were used to justify a division in Church authority.

From the time of the fall of Rome the Christian kingdoms in Western Europe lacked a centralized, imperial government. For brief periods under leaders like Charlemagne or Otto the Great, the west was somewhat united politically, but the Christians of the west looked primarily to the Church as a unifying institution. The Papacy sometimes fell under the control of Italian nobles, but over the long term, the Bishop of Rome was more independent than the Patriarch of Constantinople, whose spiritual authority was constantly subject to imperial interference.

Caesaropapism is the term used to describe the subjection of the spiritual authority of the Church to the secular authority and it applies especially to the Eastern Empire. It was largely responsible for the East West schism because it made the Eastern bishops beholden to their Emperor rather than the pope, and politicized Church matters such as dogma, heresies, and traditional worship.

Iconoclast and other Heresies — The reason heresies were so destructive in Eastern Christendom is that some of them grew with the backing of emperors or political factions. The most notorious heresy associated with the Eastern Empire was **Iconoclasm**, the destruction of religious statues and images. This terrible heresy was promoted by the Eastern Emperor Leo III and caused much division and antagonism between the East and West. The destruction of traditional religious imagery in the centuries following the Moslem conquest of Byzantine territory, especially outraged Christians in Italy and Greece, territories still nominally under the influence of the Emperor. Since the Papacy condemned the heresy, the Iconoclast heresy inflamed division by weakening Italian Christians' political allegiance to the Emperor, and by reducing the eastern bishop's allegiance to the Pope.

Even before the Iconoclast heresy, however, Eastern Christendom was much more divided by heresies than the west. In the centuries before the Moslem conquered much formerly Byzantine territory, the Nestorian and Monothelite heresies were widespread and well organized subcultures throughout the east, and with their own bishops, schools, and monasteries. The factionalism between Christian sects in the east was one of the reasons Eastern Christians failed to unite effectively against the Moslems. For centuries after the Moslem conquest these heretical Christian communities continued to assert political influence in the region and dash any hope of united Christian resistance to Islamic government.

The Photius Schism — A brief schism between East and West occurred in the ninth century that had no real theological cause, but set a precedent for the permanent schism two hundred years later. The only issue during the Photian Schism (863-867) was "who was the legitimate patriarch of Constantinople?" The schism occurred when a corrupt member of the Imperial family attempted to increase his influence over the Emperor by imprisoning the lawful Patriarch and installing Photius, a brilliant, but corrupt layman. The deposed Patriarch appealed to the Pope, who condemned Photius and insisted that he step down.

Photius refused to step down and instead framed a list of accusations against the Holy See and Western Church, and made entirely frivolous charges against the Latin Church whose only purpose was to inflame opposition to the Pope. The schism came to an end quickly however, not through theological reconciliation, but because the Emperor died and his replacement deposed Photius and sought reconciliation with Rome. The main significance of the schism was the precedent it set for political shenanigans and mutual ex-communication.

Rise of the Franks and an Empire of the West — In the early 700s the Byzantines lost Ravenna and most of central Italy to the Lombards. They still controlled much territory in Southern Italy and Sicily, so they moved their western capital to Syracuse. This allowed the Eastern Empire to defend their remaining ports and trading interests the Mediterranean, while ceding control of Northern and central Italy. By the early 800s, however, Moslem raiders began to attack Byzantine territory in Southern Italy, and by 902 all of Sicily was under Moslem control.

While Byzantine influence in Italy waned the Christians states in formerly Byzantine regions were threatened from Pagans in the north and Moslems in the south. By the 750s, Rome had strengthened its alliance with the Franks, the only Christian kingdom capable of defending the interest of the papacy. The loyalty of the Franks had been proven at the **Battle of Tours** and again after the fall of the **Exarchate of Ravenna**. Soon after the Byzantines lost control of central Italy, **Pepin the Short** led a Frankish army into Italy and returned control of the area directly to the papacy. Fifty years later, Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the West, and even though the Pope had turned to the Franks out of necessity rather than treachery, the installation of a rival Christian emperor greatly increased the conflict between East and West because it created a permanent political division within Christendom.

The East West Schism — The 1054 east-west schism occurred when rulers of several small kingdoms in Southern Italy, that had once been allied with the Byzantines, insisted that Greek Churches in their domain must conform to the Latin rite. The Patriarch of Constantinople retaliated by closing Latin Churches in the east and a formal schism resulted when a Papal delegation sent to resolve the conflict was rebuffed.

This incident was part of a centuries long struggle for control of Italy raging between Lombards, Italians, Normans, Byzantines, Moslems, and Norse mercenaries. The conflict immediately preceding the Schism involved Norman princes who had first come to Italy to fight as mercenaries on behalf of the Byzantine Empire.

Moslems in Sicily and the Rise of the Normans — Beginning during the 9th century, Moslem raiders had gradually taken control of strategic ports in Sicily and by the early 10th century had control of most of the Island. From their base in Sicily the Mohammedans launched attacks on southern Italy. The political alliances and conflicts in Italy between Lombards, Byzantines, Italians, Germans, the Papacy, and local princes during tenth century is far too complicated to follow. By the beginning of the 11th century, however, Norman mercenaries began to get involved, and the fortunes of the Moslems warlords in the region took a dramatic turn for the worse.

By the time the Normans arrived in Italy, Moorish influence throughout the Mediterranean was waning and resurgent Christians resumed campaigning against the invaders. The Normans were Latin Christians and were employed as mercenaries by both Italian princes and the Byzantine Emperor in their battles against the Moslems. This worked well at first, but eventually Norman chieftains, soon took matters into their own hands. By 1041 the Normans were no longer mercenaries, but fighting on their own against all sides for to create a network of independent Norman fiefdoms in Southern Italy. The greatest of the Norman warriors in Italy were the **seven sons of Tancred of Hauteville**, including **Robert Guiscard** and **Roger of Sicily**. These brothers were chiefly responsible for the complete expulsion of Moors from Southern Italy.

The battles to retake Italy were many sided. Normans fought for and against both Latin and Greek factions in the region, and both for and against the Papacy. But in the end the Norman princes prevailed. The success of the Normans, where the Byzantines had failed caused a much jealousy and hostility. It was in this environment that the Schism occurred. The Normans won a key battle in 1053 against the Pope and his allies and the effort to convert Greek Churches in the region to Latin control followed shortly after.

Byzantine-Norman Conflicts and the First Crusade — The most significant Norman victories in Italy and Sicily occurred after the East-Schism. By 1091, just five years before Urban II called the First Crusade, Norman princes controlled much of Southern Italy, and all of Sicily. Unfortunately, these great victories for Christendom against Islam came at the expense of the prestige and influence of the Byzantines. And to aggravate the situation further, the victorious Normans attempted to expand their territory and made several raids into the Balkans. At the time the Crusades were called, therefore, the Byzantines and Normans were on very hostile terms. The Normans, however, had had conflicts with many other Christian sovereigns, and were only one of many factions representing Latin Christianity.

In spite of the ongoing conflicts, both Popes and Emperors hoped for a reconciliation. When Urban II called the first crusade in 1095 it was with the sincere intention of assisting Eastern Christendom, and it was generally understood that any territory won in the East would be vassals of the Byzantine Emperor. However, the political situation in the east was impossibly complicated, and the top priority of the Emperor was to resist the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor rather than taking the holy land. This put his goals somewhat at odds with the Crusaders who sought to restore the holy lands to Christian hands.

Unfortunately, the manner in which the Crusades played out proved disastrous for East-west relations. The Norman crusaders were, of course, entirely distrusted by the Emperor, but even the French crusaders suffered much misunderstanding and treachery at the hands of the Byzantines and their allies. The Crusader kingdoms established in the region were governed as Latin kingdoms, even though many of their inhabitants were Greek rite Christians.

Venice and the Fourth Crusade — The final blow to East West relations, however, was not dealt by the Crusader kingdoms or by the hated Normans, but by Venice, a Latin city that had been a valued trading ally with Constantinople. The maritime city of Venice benefitted the most economically from the Crusades due to its strategic location at the head of the Adriatic Sea. The growing prosperity of Venice during the 11th century, however, inspired jealousy and which culminated in a vicious attack on the Latin inhabitants of Constantinople. The "Massacre of the Latins" occurred in 1182. The Latins were seen as a wealthy merchant ruling class by Byzantine peasants and locals merchants, and it was this resentment that fueled the division between Orthodox and Latin Christendom. As the Byzantine Empire became weaker, the ruling classes sought an end the Schism. It was largely the hostility of the Greek commoners against the Latin merchants that fueled the conflict.

Timeline of East-West Conflicts and Islam Attacks

- 636 Disastrous Battle of Yarmouk: Byzantine Syria falls to the Mohammedans.
- 642 Byzantine Egypt falls to the Moslems
- 689 Byzantine North Africa falls to the Moslems
- 711 Visigoth Spain falls to the Moslems; Franks stop incursions beyond the Pyrenees
- 711-741 Rule of Leo III the Isaurian. Iconoclast heresy divides Eastern Church
- 751 Fall of the Byzantines 'Exarchate of Ravenna' in Italy. Pope turns to Franks for protection.
- 754 Pepin the Short, King of the Franks recaptures central Italy, establishes 'Papal States'.
- 800 Pope Crowns Charlemagne Holy Roman Emperor in defiance of Byzantine.
- 814-842 Second outbreak of Iconoclast Heresy
- 824-900 Moslem Conquest of Byzantine Crete and Sicily (on defense in Mediterranean)
- 867-1056 Byzantine Renaissance' : Resurgence of Byzantine influence/culture begun under Basil I
- 863-867 Photius Schism
- 902-1061 Emirate of Sicily
- 1040 Byzantines lose territory in Southern Italy to rebellious Norman mercenaries.
- 1054 Permanent East-West Schism**
- 1059 Pope Nicholas recognized Norman rulers in Southern Italy and Sicily.
- 1071 Disastrous Battle of Manzikert: Much of Byzantine Asia Minor Lost to the Seljuk Turks
- 1091 Normans conquer Sicily from Moslems, form Christian Kingdom of Sicily.
- 1095 First Crusade called by Urban II at the request of Emperor
- 1099 Creation of Crusader states in Antioch and Edessa and Jerusalem
- 1144 Fall of Edessa Crusaders state inspires 2nd and 3rd Crusade
- 1192 End of Third Crusade—Peace between Saladin and Richard I
- 1204 Constantinople sacked and looted during fourth Crusade. In hands of Latins for sixty years.
- 1204-1261 Byzantine Government in exile in Nicaea . . . 'Empire of Nicaea'.
- 1261 Constantinople reconquered by Byzantines.
- 1300 Rise of the Ottoman Dynasty under Osman I, a Turkish leader from Anatolia.
- 1298 Ottomans Cross into Europe and permanently settle in Thrace.
- 1354 Black Death and Earthquake in Gallipoli depopulate Thrace, near Constantinople.
- 1389 Battle of Kosovo—Ottomans conquer Serbia.
- 1456 John Hunyadi and John Capistrano lead defense at the Siege of Belgrade
- 1453 Fall of Constantinople under Mehmed II.