

Use the texts to answer the questions that follow.

To the Byzantines, Christianity was more than a religion. It was the very foundation of their empire.

When Constantine built his new capital, he intended it to be the religious center of the empire as well as the seat of government. Constantine himself tried to settle religious disputes by calling bishops together in council.

Over time, the Byzantine church became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church. The word *orthodox* means "in agreement with right belief." The medieval Eastern Orthodox Church was based on a set of beliefs that its leaders traced back to Jesus Christ and to the work of bishops in early Christian councils.

The Role of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Empire Religion and government were more closely linked in the Byzantine Empire than in the west. The Byzantines viewed the emperor not just as the head of the government but as the living representative of God and Jesus Christ. This meant that church and state were combined into one all-powerful body.

The state religion also united people in a common belief. The Eastern Orthodox Church played a central role in daily life. Most people attended church regularly. Religious sacraments gave shape to every stage of the journey from birth to death. Monasteries and convents cared for the poor and the sick. These institutions were supported by wealthy people and became quite powerful. Let's look at some of the practices of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Church Hierarchy Like Roman Catholic clergy, Orthodox clergy were ranked in order of importance. In Byzantine times, the emperor had supreme authority in the church. He chose the patriarch of Constantinople, who ranked next to him in matters of religion. Unlike the pope in the west, the patriarch did not claim strong authority over other patriarchs and bishops. Instead, he was "first among equals." The patriarch of Constantinople (which today is Istanbul, Turkey) still holds this honor.

Orthodox priests served under patriarchs and other bishops. Unlike Roman Catholic priests, who were not allowed to marry, many Orthodox priests were married. Bishops, however, could rise only from the ranks of unmarried clergy.

Liturgy and Prayer The Orthodox church service corresponding to the Roman Catholic mass was the Divine Liturgy. Both the clergy and worshippers sang or chanted the liturgy. The liturgy was conducted in Greek or in the local language of the people.

Orthodox Christians also prayed to saints. Two saints were particularly important in Byzantine times. Saint Basil promoted charity and reformed the liturgy. Saint Cyril helped create the Cyrillic alphabet, which allowed scholars to translate the Bible for people in eastern Europe to read.

Architecture and Art Christian faith inspired magnificent works of architecture and art in the Byzantine Empire. With its square base and high dome, Hagia Sophia served as a model for many Orthodox churches. The architecture of the church also reflects Orthodox views. The simple base represents the earthly world. Upon it rests the "dome of heaven." Rich decorations on the inside were meant to remind worshippers of what it would be like to enter God's kingdom. Building on the Greek love of art, the Orthodox church used many images in its services and prayers. Byzantine artists created beautiful icons, which were usually painted on small wooden panels. Artists also fashioned sacred images as mosaics and painted them in murals.

An image of Christ as the Pantocrator, or ruler of all, gazed down from the dome of all Orthodox churches. Christ was usually shown holding a gospel and giving a blessing. Most churches also placed an icon of Jesus' mother, Mary (called the Theotokos, or god-bearer), and the Christ child over the altar.

Many Byzantines believed that sacred pictures helped bring them closer to God. But icons also became a source of violent disagreement.

1. What is the definition of *orthodox*?
2. List the rank order of the clergy for the Eastern Orthodox Church.
3. In what language(s) was liturgy (church service) conducted in for the Orthodox Church?
4. What were the "rich decorations" of the Hagia Sophia meant to remind worshippers of?
5. What did the worshippers believe the sacred pictures did for them?

Medieval Europe and the Byzantine Empire were united in a single faith, Christianity. Over the centuries, however, cultural, political, and religious differences brought the two parts of the old Roman Empire into conflict. The two regions had been quite different even in the days of the old Roman emperors. The eastern half of the empire had many cities, much trade, and great wealth. The western half was mostly rural and agricultural, and not nearly as wealthy.

Other differences became more pronounced after the fall of Rome. Byzantine culture was largely shaped by its Greek heritage. The west was influenced by Frankish and Germanic cultures. In Constantinople, people spoke Greek. In the west, Latin was the language of scholars, diplomats, and the church.

Perhaps most important was the conflict that developed between the churches of east and west. After the fall of Rome, popes gradually emerged as powerful figures in western Europe. The popes claimed supreme religious authority over all Christians. The emperors and patriarchs of the east resisted such claims.

Other differences added to the conflict. Let's look at three major disagreements and how they led to a split in the Christian church. **Iconoclasm** The first major disagreement concerned religious icons. Many Christians in medieval times used images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints in worship and prayer. Some Christians in the east, however, believed that people were wrongly worshipping the icons themselves as if they were divine. In 730 C.E., Byzantine emperor Leo III banned the use of religious images in all Christian churches and homes.

The policy of iconoclasm ("icon smashing") led to the destruction of much religious art. Throughout Christian lands, people cried out in protest. In Rome, popes were angry because Leo's order applied to parts of Italy that were under Byzantine control. Pope Gregory III even excommunicated the emperor.

The Byzantine Empire lifted its ban on icons in 843. But the dispute over iconoclasm had caused a major split between the east and west. It also helped drive popes in Rome to look for support and protection against enemies.

The Crowning of a Holy Roman Emperor Another major disagreement occurred in 800 C.E. At the time, Empress Irene was the ruler of the Byzantine Empire. Because she was a woman, Pope Leo III did not view her as a true ruler. More important, the pope needed the protection of a strong leader to help defend the church in the west.

Leo decided to crown Charlemagne, the king of the Franks, as Holy Roman emperor. The pope's action outraged the Byzantines, who felt that they were the rightful rulers of the Roman Empire.

The Final Break Matters between east and west came to a head in 1054. The patriarch of Constantinople, Cerularius, wanted to reassert Byzantine control of the church. He closed all churches that worshiped with western rites. Pope Leo IX was furious. He sent Cardinal Humbert to Constantinople. The cardinal marched up to the altar of Hagia Sophia. In front of everyone, he laid down a bull (a proclamation by the pope) excommunicating Cerularius.

Cerularius responded by excommunicating the cardinal. This was only a symbolic act, for the patriarch did not have that power. But it showed that the split, or schism, between east and west was complete. Despite future attempts to heal the division, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church were now separate churches.

6. Why did Byzantine emperor Leo III forbid the use of icons in 730? How did the pope react to Leo's order?

7. What event in 800 increased tensions between the east and the west?

8. How did the relationship between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church change in 1054?