

# Church and state in italy during the middle ages italy! assignment

[History](#)



Church and State in Italy during the middle ages! Church has always played a major part in Italian History. As Europe gradually emerged from the destruction of the Roman Empire, the church became one of the mainstays of civilisation. The disorganisation of the Holy Roman Empire, its ongoing dispute with the papacy over the extent of Church authority in secular government and absentee foreign overlords left Italians largely self-governing within their communes.

At the start of the fourteenth century, Italy was a patchwork of independent towns and small principalities whose borders were drawn and redrawn by battles, diplomatic negotiations and marriage alliances. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, many of these petty principalities consolidated into five major political units that precariously balanced power on the Italian peninsula; the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, the Papal States and the three major city-states of Florence, Venice and Milan .

The other minor city-states which co-existed with these larger powers made political stability in Italy even more tenuous as their loyalties shifted from one main force to another. The Catholic Church was the major unifying cultural influence, preserving its selection from Latin learning, maintaining the art of writing, and a centralised administration through its network of bishops. In 380 AD, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire by the decree of the Emperor, which would persist until the fall of the Western Empire, and later, with the Eastern Roman Empire, until the Fall of Constantinople .

During this time (the period of the Seven Ecumenical Councils) there were considered five primary sees according to Eusebius: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, known as the Pentarchy . After the destruction of the western Roman Empire, the church in the West was a major factor in the preservation of classical civilisation, establishing monasteries, and sending missionaries to convert the peoples of northern Europe, even travelling as far as Ireland in the north.

In the East, the Byzantine Empire preserved Orthodoxy, well after the massive invasions of Islam in the mid-seventh century . The invasions of Islam devastated three of the five Patriarchal sees, capturing Jerusalem first, then Alexandria, and then finally in the mid-eighth century, Antioch. The whole period of the next five centuries was dominated by the struggle between Christianity and Islam throughout the Mediterranean Basin. The battles of Poitiers, and Toulouse preserved the

Catholic west, even though Rome itself was ravaged in 850 AD, and Constantinople besieged . In the 11th century, already strained relations between the primarily Greek church in the East, and the Latin church in the West, developed into the East-West Schism, partially due to conflicts over Papal Authority. The fourth crusade and the sacking of Constantinople by renegade crusaders proved the final breach . In the 16th century, in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Church engaged in a process of substantial reform and renewal, known as the Counter-Reformation.

In subsequent centuries, Catholicism spread widely across the world despite experiencing a reduction in its hold on European populations due to the

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growth of religious scepticism during and after the Enlightenment . The Second Vatican Council in the 1960s introduced the most significant changes to Catholic practices since the Council of Trent three centuries before . Bishops were central to Middle Age society due to the literacy they possessed. As a result, they often played a significant role in governance.

However, beyond the core areas of Western Europe, there remained many people with little or no contact with Christianity or with classical Roman culture . Martial societies such as the Avars and the Vikings were still capable of causing major disruption to the newly emerging societies of Western Europe. The Early Middle Ages witnessed the rise of monasticism within the west. Although the impulse to withdraw from society to focus upon a spiritual life is experienced by people of all cultures, the shape of European monasticism was determined by traditions and ideas that originated in the deserts of Egypt and Syria .

The style of monasticism that focuses on community experience of the spiritual life, called coenobitism, was pioneered by the saint Pachomius in the 4th century . Monastic ideals spread from Egypt to Western Europe in the 5th and 6th centuries through hagiographical literature such as the Life of Saint Anthony . Monasteries become the core focus for the education of Italians once the administration collapsed and the Church took over. However with the monasteries in charge of the learning they also had the right to choose what would be taught and what would be thrown out.

Anything they didn't see as ' Christian' would not be able to be used in library's or classes . This allowed the church to dominate the future teaching

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direction of all Italian people. Books they found ' unchristian' where removed and burnt from all libraries, Art work that wasn't up to Christian standards was also removed and either ruined or sold to other countries. A great number of the Italian cultural history was lost during this Christian period. The Italian culture today is due largely to the churches influence in the middle ages.

The Church formed many traditions that are still in place today. The history of the State is one that has fashioned Italy for many years though out all their battles and rulers, each has shaped Italy in one way or another. Every decision made over the years has been one of great debate and will continue for many years. The Christian church holds an astonishing power over the cities and the way the country is run. The culture and churches influence will be a forever lasting one within Italy.