

The great schism: the break of east and west essay sample

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



The Great Schism of the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church is usually described as the period that the One Christian Church at that time severed their relations with each other. The Greeks in the east and the Latin-speaking peoples in the West of the then Roman Empire, after years of wrangling in the contexts of social, political and cultural differences, finally separated themselves from each other in the year 1054, after a long and tumultuous period.

We strive to know if the Schism was arrived at in a short period of time, or was the separation of the two churches built up for a period before the actual separation took place. We also should ask what made them separate, the factors that decided the fate of these two religious bodies to separate. In understanding and why the communion of Christendom was broken, we must start with this fact of increasing estrangement.

“ Definition”

The Great Schism, in the history of the Christian Church, is the term used to refer to both the break between the Eastern and Western churches, traditionally dated between 1054, and the period (1378-1417) in the Western church when two (then three) popes claimed simultaneously claimed to be Pope, beginning after the death of Pope GregoryX, who had finally moved the papacy from Avignon back to Rome.

“ History of the Schism”

But the schism, as historians now generally agree, cannot be traced to a single date that can be recognized as the actual start. It was something that

came about gradually, as the result of a long and complicated process, starting well before the eleventh century until some time after.

As early as the fourth century, there were cultural, political factors and linguistic differences between the Christians of Eastern and Western Europe which eventually led to the eventual separation in the Church, yet its fundamental cause was not secular but theological in the last resort it was over matters of doctrine that East and West quarreled-two in particular, the Papal Claims and the Filioque.

(The *Filioque*, “ *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum qui ex patre filioque procedit*, the term used in the Nicene Creed to indicate that the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Trinity, stems from the Father AND the Son, which runs counter to the belief of the Orthodox Church that the Holy Spirit is from the Father alone. Basically, it refers to the procession of the Holy Spirit). It was assailed vehemently by Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople in 867 and 879.

Linguistic and other factors

The Eastern Christians spoke Greek, shared a common language and cultural background, where the Western Christians spoke Latin. The Eastern Church's hierarchy was ruled by a group of bishops that ruled collegially the body of the Church in that part of the Empire. Each ruled a jurisdictional area or patriarchate, located in Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Byzantium, which all spoke the Greek language.

From the fourth century onwards the Church had five patriarchs or heads. The patriarchates that spoke Latin were found in Rome, which was supervised by the bishop of Rome as one of the five patriarchal heads of the Church at that time.

Unfortunately, by the Eleventh century AD, the differences that separated East and West became great enough to cause a separation of the One Holy Orthodox Catholic Church, with the Eastern part of the Church calling itself as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Church as the Roman Catholic Church, for it was governed by the bishop of Rome. Again it would be emphasized that there were many factors that led to the schism of the one Christian Church.

Theological debates that were promulgated by the Western church were never and to this day, not practiced by the Orthodox Church such as Infallibility of the Pope of Rome on matters of church doctrine, the universal jurisdictional authority of the Pope of Rome, the Doctrine of Purgatory, the immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the unauthorized addition of “and the Son” in the Nicene Creed. Interestingly many of the issues that continue to divide the Church today came to be divisive much later.

Definitions of Catholic Dogmas

1. *Immaculate Conception* -It is the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church holding that from the first instant of its creation, the soul of the Virgin Mary was free from original sin.

Opposition to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was conducted in the 12th century by the French monastic St. Bernard of Clairvaux and in the 13th century by the famous Italian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas.

2. *Purgatory* – In Christian theology, in which according to the Roman Catholic and Eastern churches, souls after death are purified from venial sins or undergo temporal punishment that, after the guilt of mortal sin has been remitted, still remains to be endured by the sinners.

The matter was decided in the Council of Ferrara-Florence that the Eastern definition was to be accepted, that the punishment will not involve fire in the punishment in the middle stage of death, or in Purgatory.

3. *Apostolic Succession*- Doctrine that the apostles designated their successors or bishops through prayer and the laying on of hands, and that bishops have in turn designated their successors ever since.

4. *Filioque*- Refers to the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. The Filioque was probably devised in response to Arianism, which denied the full divinity of the Son.

(Arianism, named after Arius of Alexandria, Egypt, is the belief that Jesus was not of the same substance of God and holding instead that He was only the highest of created being, viewed as heresy by most Christian churches. Developed at around 320, Arius taught that only God the Father was eternal and too pure to dwell on earth and infinite to appear on earth. Therefore,

God produced Christ the Son out of nothing as the first and greatest creation. The Son is then the one who created the universe.)

At Jesus' incarnation, the Arians asserted that the divine quality of the Son, the Logos, took the place of the human and spiritual aspect of Jesus, thereby denying the full and complete incarnation of God the Son, second person of the Trinity. In asserting that Christ the Son, as a created being, was to be worshipped, the Arians were advocating idolatry.

5. *Papal infallibility*- Doctrine that in matters of faith and morals of the church, both in teaching and in believing is protected from substantive error by divine dispensation. The doctrine is generally associated with the Roman Catholic Church, but it is also applied by the Orthodox Church to decisions of ecumenical councils.

According to the definition promulgated in 1870 by the First Vatican Council, the Pope exercises an infallible teaching office only when (1) he speaks *ex cathedra* _that is, in his official capacity as pastor and teacher;(2) he speaks with the manifest intention of binding the entire church to acceptance, and (3) the matter pertains to faith and morals taught as a part of divine revelation handed down from apostolic times. The Protestants oppose to this teaching, saying that only God is the only one who is infallible and the source for all divine revelation.

Finally, in 1854, Pope Pius IX issued a solemn decree declaring the Immaculate Conception to be a dogma essential for the belief of the universal church.

In the centuries that followed, the unity of the Mediterranean world gradually disappeared, with the political unity to go first. From the end of the third century, the Empire, existing in theory as one, was actually divided into two parts, an Eastern and a Western, each with its own Emperor. The Eastern Emperor Constantine furthered this process by founding a second capital for the Empire in the East, along side Old Rome in Italy. At the start of the fifth century, hordes of barbarian started to invade the Empire.

Apart from Italy, much of which remained in the Empire for some time longer, the Western part of the Empire was carved up among the barbarian chiefs. The Byzantines never forgot the ideals of Rome under Augustus and Trajan, and still regarded their Empire in theory universal, but Justinian was the last Emperor who seriously attempted to bridge the gulf between theory and fact, the theory that the Roman Empire is still intact in fact as well as in belief. His conquests to reclaim the Western part of the Empire were soon abandoned, and the political unity of the Greek East and the Latin West was destroyed by the barbarians and never permanently restored.

During the late sixth and seventh centuries, east and west were further isolated by from each other by the Avar and Slav invasions of the Balkan Peninsula. The severance was carried a stage further by the rise of Islam; the Mediterranean, which the Romans once called *mare nostrum*, “our sea”, now passed largely into Arab control.

The situation between Rome and Constantinople had been increasingly tense and the two centers were becoming increasingly isolated from each other.

The temporary Photian Schism in the 860's was due to disagreements over papal interference in the life of the Church in Constantinople and Bulgaria as well as differing liturgical practices.

By the mid eleventh century, a disagreement arose over Byzantine liturgical in South Italy and Latin practices in the East. In addition, the recent Popes were beginning to claim universal supremacy over church matters which led to further disagreements.

The Iconoclast contributed still further to the division between Byzantium and the West. The Popes were firm supporters of the Iconodule standpoint, and for many decades they found themselves out of communion with the Iconoclast Emperor and the Patriarch at Constantinople. (Iconoclasm- Any movement against the religious use of images, especially the one that disturbed the Byzantine Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries).

Finally, political developments in the West led the Papal throne and other Western powers to make claims over disputed areas which the Emperor in Constantinople was unwilling to concede. The result was increased tensions and a lack of communication which would be costly in the end.

The growing list of differences between East and West simply exacerbated the tensions. One of the most striking differences was that as new people were evangelized in the West, they had to use Latin as their liturgical and ecclesiastical language, while looking to Rome for leadership. On the other hand, missionaries from the east translated the Bible into the language of the people.

With all these issues in place, there simply needed to be an excuse which would spark the division. And soon enough, the spark needed for the eventual separation was lit.

“ The Spark”

As Western culture was gradually transformed, for instance by the influx of Germanic peoples, the East sustained an unbroken tradition of Hellenistic Christianity. Although respectful of the prerogatives of Rome as the original capital of the Empire, the Church at Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) resented some of the jurisdictional claims made by the Popes, claims vigorously renewed and amplified during the pontificate of Leo IX (1048-54) and his successors. During his pontificate, in 1054, the long-standing rift between Christians in the Eastern and Western regions of the former Roman Empire culminated in the excommunication by the Western Church of the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Angered by Leo's interference in areas of southern Italy claimed by the Byzantine Empire, the Patriarch Michael Cerularius closed all the Christian (Latin) churches in Constantinople. Because a settlement was desired by both sides, Leo dispatched an embassy to Constantinople to negotiate the issue. In 1053, Pope Leo IX sent legates to Constantinople to negotiate with patriarch Michael Cerularius. On July 16, 1054, tired of waiting for an audience with the Patriarch, Leo's legate, Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, matching Cerularius in narrow-minded zeal concluded his visit by excommunicating the patriarch and his followers.

He marched into the church of Hagia Sophia during services, and in full view of the congregation, threw down on the high altar a papal bull or document of Anathema. (A papal bull is a special letter or document bearing the Pope's own seal. The Papal seal affixed to most bulls is made of lead. A golden seal, or *bullae aurea*, is attached to papal documents of special gravity.), excommunicating Cerularius and his supporters.

The reasons cited for the excommunication was the removal of the filioque from the Creed (The Eastern Church did not accept the addition on two distinct grounds(1) it was made unilaterally, altering a creed approved by early ecumenical councils, and, (2) the formula reflected a particular conception of the Trinity, to which most Byzantine theologians objected) , the practice of married clergy (The Roman Catholic Church is of the belief that priests practice celibacy), and divergent liturgical practices.

Cerularius responded by drawing up a list of Latin abuses and issued a Bull of Excommunication against them after a synod of Bishops on July 20. In addition, Cerularius answered by rejecting the papal assertion of supremacy and by presenting an encyclical asserting Byzantine independence from and equality with the Western Church. With the one act of frustration and impatience, his act was later interpreted by the Greeks as an excommunication of the entire Greek Church.

The coronation of the Frankish king Charles the Great, or Charlemagne, on Christmas Day in the year 800 by Pope Leo, further drove a wedge into the escalating division of the East and West. The Popes went to the Franks for

support and the Franks gave it to them. Charlemagne sought recognition from the ruler at Byzantine, but without success; for the Byzantines, still adhering to the principle of imperial unity, regarded Charlemagne as an intruder and the Papal coronation as an act of schism within the Empire.

“ Reconciliation efforts”

There were several attempts to try and unify the centers of the Christian faith over the centuries, with limited or no success. Among them are the following incidents that the two Churches attempted to mend the fences of the schism:

- There was an attempt in 1089 for a reconciliation between Pope Urban II and Patriarch Nicholas III but it came to nothing
- On December 7, 1965, the mutual excommunications were cancelled by Pope Paul VI and patriarch Athenogoras I as part of a larger effort to draw the two churches together.

The last attempt was made by Pope John Paul II when he sought to end the schism that has split the Roman Catholic Church for nearly 1, 000 years. A series of held between the leaders of the two churches in an effort to find common ground. Though they both believe in the supremacy of the Bible as the infallible Word of God, Roman Catholics believe also in unwritten traditions as part of their belief.

“ How many are there who are Eastern Orthodox?”

There are an estimated 225 to 300 million Christians in the Eastern Orthodox Church worldwide. The umbrella of the Eastern Orthodoxy includes the following churches: British Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Orthodox Church of Finland, Russian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, the Church of Alexandria, the Church in Jerusalem, and the Orthodox Church of America.

Works Cited

About. com. " The Great Schism". 4 December 2007.

[http://atheism. about. com/library/glossary/western/belief/greatschismwest. htm](http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/western/belief/greatschismwest.htm)

Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry. " Arianism" 4 December 2007.

[http://www. carm. org. heresy/arainiasm. html](http://www.carm.org/heresy/arainiasm.html)

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta com (2007)" Apostolic Succession"

4 December 2007

[http://encarta. msn. com](http://encarta.msn.com)

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta com (2007)" Filioque"

4 December 2007

[http://encarta. msn. com](http://encarta.msn.com)

<https://assignbuster.com/the-great-schism-the-break-of-east-and-west-essay-sample/>

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta. com (2007).” Great Schism”.
4 December 2007.

<http://encarta.msn.com>.

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta com (2007)” Iconoclasm”
4 December 2007

<http://encarta.msn.com>

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta com (2007)” Immaculate
Conception”

4 December 2007

<http://encarta.msn.com>

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta com (2007)” Infallibility”

4 December 2007

<http://encarta.msn.com>

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta. com (2007)” Papal Bull”

4 December 2007.

<http://encarta.msn.com>

Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Encarta com (2007)” Purgatory”

<https://assignbuster.com/the-great-schism-the-break-of-east-and-west-essay-sample/>

4 December 2007

<http://encarta.msn.com>

OrthodoxPhotos.com. "The Great Schism: Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism".

4 December 2007.

http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/readings/Orthodox_Church/origin.shtml

Silouan. "The estrangement of Eastern and Western Christendom. 4 December 2007.

<http://www.philthompson.nt/index2.html>

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. "The Great Schism of 1054". 4 December 2007.

<http://www.stnicholas-billings.org/History/GreatMoments/schism.htm>

gotQuestions.Org. "What was the Great Schism?" 4 December 2007.

http://www.gotquestions.orh/great_schism.html