

# The Great Schism

©LMS/10

## The Great Schism of 1054

- The *Great Schism* of 1054, also known as the *East-West Schism*, was the event that split the *Christian Church* into eastern and western sects. The term *schism* means split.
- This event is significant because it represents the first definitive break in *Christian unity*.
- Out of this break came the western *Roman Catholic Church*, and the *Eastern Orthodox Church*.



## The Final Straw

- The schism in Christianity was a long time coming. Obviously, there had been differences between the east and west for many years, but this issue was the breaker.
- The pope is also known as the *Bishop of Rome*. As the *Bishop of Rome*, he claimed supremacy over the *Bishops of other major cities*, including *Constantinople*. This irritated the *Bishop, or Patriarch* (as he preferred to be called), of *Constantinople*.
- The eastern *Patriarchs* argued that the *Pope* had authority only over the west, and that the *Patriarch of Constantinople* had authority over the east.
- This disagreement peaked in 1054 when *Pope Leo IX* and *Patriarch Michael I* *excommunicated* each other, or kicked each other out of the church. *Excommunication* was a very serious penalty, because it meant no access to the *sacraments*, and no entrance to *heaven*.
- This finalized the break in the *Church* that had been building for many years. *Eastern Orthodoxy* was born.



## East-West Differences

- Eastern and Western churches had been growing apart for years as they developed different practices, and sometimes, they adopted different *doctrines* (religious beliefs or rules).
- For starters, church services in the east were conducted in *Greek* – which was the language of the majority of people. In the west, church services were conducted in *Latin*, a practice which continued in the *Roman Catholic Church* until the 1960s.
- Secondly, churches in the east were allowing their priests to marry. The western churches would not embrace this, and the *Roman Catholic Church* continues to disallow this practice.
- Third, the eastern churches allowed divorce in certain circumstances. The western churches forbid divorce, and the *Catholic Church* continues to frown on it today.
- Finally, the issue of *icons*. Icons are religious pictures that were used to aid in worship. The eastern churches had outlawed their use, suggesting it was idol worship. The west disagreed with this policy.



## Result?

- Eastern Orthodoxy would come to dominate Eastern Europe in the form of *Greek* and *Russian Orthodoxy*. It helps to explain some of the cultural differences between eastern and western Europe.
- The split was nasty, and left hard feelings which spilled over into the *Crusades*. Western knights sacked *Constantinople* and killed *Orthodox Christians*.