THE CHURCH

The church and government worked closely together in the Byzantine Empire. Since Christianity was the official religion, everyone was expected to be a Christian.

The leader of the church in Constantinople was called the Patriarch. He was chosen by the emperor. The monasteries played an important role. They helped the poor and ran hospitals and schools for needy kids.

After the split, the Byzantine Empire did not always get along with the western side. They disagreed on how to view God, what type of bread to use in communion, and they even spoke different languages. One matter troubled the empire for a long time. It was all about the use of icons, or religious images, and whether or not they should be used in worship.

Many Byzantines honored icons. They covered the walls with pictures of Jesus and Mary, and worshiped them. Some believed that icons were a form of idol worship, which was forbidden by God.

The fight over icons divided the empire. Because many people in the west could not read, idols and images were used instead of written words.

When Emperor Leo III banned the use of icons, a fight began. The Pope in Rome and the Patriarch in the east no longer recognized each other. Eventually, they sides broke apart. This fight led to a schism, or split in the Christian church. In the Byzantine Empire, it was known as Greek Orthodox. In the west, it was called Roman Catholic. They are still separate today.