

ROME AND CONSTANTINOPLE: THE ROAD TO THE GREAT SCHISM

From Nicaea II to the Conventional East-West Schism, AD 787-1054

The Genealogy of Christian Division

A Historical and Biblical Study of Schism, Reformation, and the Making of Modern Christianity

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Abstract

Between AD 787 and 1054, the Latin West and Greek East did not pass from unity to schism in a single dramatic moment. They remained linked by a common Chalcedonian and Nicene inheritance, sacramental life, episcopal structures, saints, missions, and repeated efforts at communion, even as political, linguistic, canonical, liturgical, and jurisdictional differences accumulated. This chapter reconstructs that gradual estrangement from the unsettled aftermath of the Second Council of Nicaea through the Carolingian-Byzantine rivalry, the Photian controversy, missionary competition in the Balkans and Slavic lands, the spread of the Filioque in the Latin Creed, the reforming papacy of Leo IX, and the events of 1054. It gives particular attention to the development of Roman primacy from ancient honor and appellate influence toward stronger claims of universal jurisdiction; Constantinople's countervailing appeal to conciliar order, canonical precedence, and imperial status; the theological and procedural dimensions of the Filioque; differences over clerical marriage, fasting, and Eucharistic bread; and the strategic importance of Bulgaria, Moravia, Rus, and southern Italy. The chapter argues that 1054 is best treated as a conventional milestone within a longer process: Humbert's bull and the Constantinopolitan response targeted persons, did not instantly sever every relationship between the churches, and gained their later symbolic weight because subsequent conflicts hardened the division. A *Sola Scriptura* assessment affirms the biblical call to doctrinal truth and visible unity while testing papal universal jurisdiction, unilateral alteration of an ecumenical creed, pneumatological formulas, and identity-making liturgical customs by the apostolic Scriptures rather than by antiquity or institutional prestige alone.

Keywords: *Great Schism; Rome; Constantinople; papal primacy; Filioque; Photius; Charlemagne; East-West relations*

1. Introduction: A Schism That Took Centuries

The conventional date 1054 is useful only if it is handled carefully. It names a memorable confrontation between representatives of Rome and Constantinople, but it does not identify the birthday of either Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, nor does it mark the instant at which every Latin and Greek Christian recognized that communion had ended. By the eleventh century the churches of the Latin West and the Byzantine East had already accumulated centuries of divergent political experience, theological vocabulary, canonical practice, liturgical custom, and institutional memory. Yet they also continued to recognize a vast common inheritance. The same Nicene-Constantinopolitan confession, the Chalcedonian Christological settlement, baptism, Eucharist, episcopal ministry, monastic life, the veneration of many of the same saints, and shared claims to apostolic continuity still joined them. The history of the Great Schism is therefore a history of estrangement within a still-recognizable communion before it became a history of durable separation.

The chronological starting point, AD 787, follows naturally from the preceding chapter. The Second Council of Nicaea restored the honorific veneration of icons after the first Byzantine iconoclast crisis, but its settlement was neither immediately secure in the East nor uniformly understood in the West. A second Byzantine iconoclasm began in 815 and lasted until 843. Frankish theologians criticized the Greek council through the *Opus Caroli*, Rome defended Nicaea II, and the controversy exposed differences in translation, political allegiance, and theological style that were already making East and West less able to interpret one another charitably. The end of iconoclasm in 843 strengthened Byzantine confidence in an Orthodox imperial and conciliar inheritance just as the Carolingian and later German imperial worlds were constructing their own Christian Roman identity (Auzepy, 2010; Brubaker & Haldon, 2011; Foden, 2024).

Four questions govern the chapter. First, how did Roman claims move from acknowledged precedence, Petrine prestige, and episodic appellate intervention toward more comprehensive assertions of papal jurisdiction? Second, why did Constantinople, itself a comparatively late patriarchal see elevated because it was New Rome, resist that expansion while defending a conciliar and patriarchal order in which Rome was first but not an absolute monarch? Third, how did the Filioque move from a Western theological formula to a liturgical and ecclesiological fault line? Fourth, why did political rivalry, mission, and apparently secondary practices such as Eucharistic bread, fasting, and clerical discipline acquire the power to signify incompatible ecclesial identities? The answer is cumulative. No single cause created the schism. Authority, doctrine, empire, language, rite, law, and memory interacted until disagreement became a durable boundary (Chadwick, 2003; Siecienski, 2010, 2017).

This cumulative interpretation also guards against two opposite distortions. One is the claim that Rome and Constantinople were essentially identical until a sudden act of mutual excommunication shattered an otherwise undifferentiated church. The evidence shows older divergences and several earlier ruptures. The other is the claim that the schism had been inevitable for centuries because Latin and Greek Christianity were intrinsically incompatible. That also overstates the evidence. Communion survived serious disputes, including the Photian crisis, and could be restored after condemnations. Historical actors repeatedly negotiated accommodations because unity was still possible within a range of regional diversity. The decisive question is therefore not when every difference first appeared, but when differences ceased to be negotiable within a shared ecclesial framework.

2. Sources, Chronology, and Method

The evidence for AD 787-1054 is abundant but confessionally charged. Conciliar canons, papal letters, patriarchal correspondence, imperial legislation, Frankish theological writings, Byzantine chronicles, missionary vitae, polemical treatises, and later collections all preserve valuable information, yet almost none of them is neutral. The *Opus Caroli* was written to criticize the Frankish understanding of Nicaea II. Photius' *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* is a theological polemic against Latin pneumatology. Papal letters of Nicholas I and Leo IX assert Roman claims in the very disputes historians use to reconstruct the development of those claims. The bull deposited in Hagia Sophia in 1054 and the Constantinopolitan response were instruments of conflict, not dispassionate descriptions of the opposing church. The historian must therefore distinguish what a source establishes from what its rhetoric alleges.

Modern scholarship has revised several older simplifications. The Frankish rejection of Nicaea II, for example, should not be explained only as the result of a poor Latin translation. Translation problems mattered, but the Carolingian response also expressed a distinctive theology of images, a political desire to evaluate Byzantine claims independently, and a broader contest over Christian Roman legitimacy (Foden, 2024). The Photian controversy likewise cannot be reduced to a personal quarrel between an ambitious pope and an arrogant patriarch. It involved disputed patriarchal succession, papal appellate authority, imperial intervention, Bulgarian jurisdiction, Latin missionary practice, and the Filioque. Finally, recent scholarship on 1054 emphasizes the centrality of rite and authority, particularly the controversy over unleavened bread in a South Italian setting destabilized by Norman conquest, rather than reading every later Catholic-Orthodox disagreement back into that July (Whalen, 2007).

The chapter therefore follows four controls. Chronology comes before retrospective denominational identity. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox trajectories can be traced before 1054, but their later institutional self-definitions are not projected backward unchanged. Second, claims of primacy and conciliarity are described from their strongest primary and scholarly evidence before biblical evaluation. Third, theological formulas are interpreted in their own linguistic systems: Greek *ekporeusis*, Latin *processio*, and the phrase *Filioque* cannot be treated as though translation alone settles the doctrinal question. Fourth, the events of 1054 are interpreted in light of what contemporaries did and did not do, not merely in light of the symbolic meaning later generations assigned to them.

Table 1. Selected chronology of East-West estrangement, AD 787-1054

Date / period	Development	Genealogical significance
787	Second Council of Nicaea restores icon veneration	Rome receives the council; Frankish criticism soon exposes distinct Western reception.
800	Leo III crowns Charlemagne emperor in Rome	A rival Western imperial identity complicates relations with Constantinople.
809	Council of Aachen supports Filioque	Carolingian theology presses a creedal addition that Leo III accepts doctrinally but resists inserting into the Creed.
815-843	Second Byzantine iconoclasm	Nicaea II is reversed and then permanently restored in Byzantium in 843.
858	Photius becomes patriarch of Constantinople	Disputed succession after Ignatius becomes a jurisdictional crisis.
863	Cyril and Methodius sent to Moravia	Slavic mission becomes a field of both cooperation and rivalry between Rome, Constantinople, and Frankish clergy.
863-867	Nicholas I challenges Photian settlement	Papal intervention and Bulgarian jurisdiction intensify East-West conflict.
867	Council associated with Photius condemns Nicholas and Latin innovations	Filioque becomes a major doctrinal symbol of the rupture.
869-870	Council of Constantinople deposes Photius	Rome later counts it as the eighth ecumenical council; Eastern reception is different.
879-880	Council of Constantinople restores Photius and communion	Demonstrates that the ninth-century rupture was not permanent.
966-1000	Poland and Hungary enter Latin Christian orbit	Latin ecclesial geography expands eastward.
988	Baptism of Vladimir of Kyiv and Christianization of Rus	Byzantine Christianity gains a vast northern sphere of influence.
1014	Filioque enters the Creed in the Roman Mass	The Roman liturgy now uses the Western addition long established elsewhere.
1049-1054	Reforming pontificate of Leo IX	Papal legation, canon-law revival, and universal claims sharpen the 1054 confrontation.
1053	Azymes and Latin-rite controversy intensifies	Southern Italy and Constantinople become immediate theaters of dispute.

Date / period	Development	Genealogical significance
16 July 1054	Humbert deposits bull in Hagia Sophia	Cerularius and associates are condemned by the legates.
20-24 July 1054	Constantinopolitan synod meets and its anathema is promulgated	The synod met on 20 July; the condemnation was publicly promulgated on 24 July. The censures targeted persons, not the whole Latin Church.

ROME AND CONSTANTINOPLE

Selected milestones on the road to the Great Schism, AD 787-1054

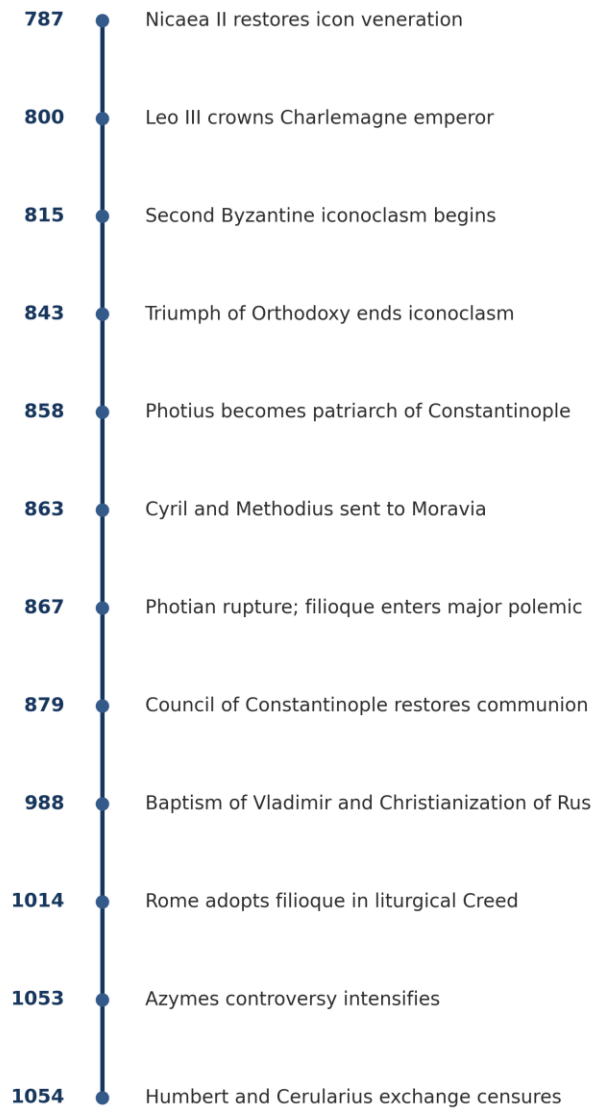


Figure 1. Selected milestones on the road to the Great Schism, AD 787-1054.

Note. The timeline marks turning points rather than a single irreversible rupture. Communion was broken and restored more than once before 1054.

3. What Existed in 787: One Chalcedonian Communion, Several Ecclesial Worlds

At the close of Nicaea II, Rome and Constantinople still belonged to the same broad Chalcedonian communion, but they did not inhabit the same political world. The old Western Roman Empire had disappeared. Rome was a city of immense apostolic prestige located in a fragmented Italian peninsula, exposed to Lombard pressure and increasingly dependent on alliances north of the Alps. Constantinople remained the capital of a functioning Roman Empire whose emperor still understood himself as ruler of the Christian Roman polity. Greek was dominant in the East; Latin predominated in the West. Administrative habits, legal traditions, intellectual networks, and political horizons were therefore diverging even when the churches professed the same central dogmas.

The ecclesiastical map was equally asymmetrical. Rome's position rested on several mutually reinforcing claims: its association with Peter and Paul, its service as an ancient imperial capital, its record of intervention in doctrinal disputes, and the increasingly explicit conviction of Roman bishops that Peter's pastoral commission had a continuing juridical significance in his see. Constantinople's status rested on a different logic. It was not an apostolic see in the same way Rome, Alexandria, or Antioch claimed to be. Its rise was canonical and political. Canon 3 of Constantinople I in 381 granted its bishop precedence of honor after Rome because the city was New Rome; canon 28 of Chalcedon in 451 extended that logic, assigning Constantinople privileges and jurisdictional reach appropriate to the imperial capital. Rome accepted Constantinople's practical importance but rejected canon 28's attempt to ground precedence primarily in imperial status (Dvornik, 1966; Siecienski, 2017).

A further fault line had already appeared at the Quinisext Council in Trullo in 691-692. Eastern bishops issued disciplinary canons on clerical marriage, fasting, liturgical practice, and other matters. Rome did not simply receive the collection as ecumenical legislation. Canon 13 defended continued marital life for already married presbyters and deacons, explicitly contrasting the Roman practice of continence. Canon 55 criticized fasting on Saturdays in Lent, which was associated with Roman custom. These were not yet causes of schism, but they show that by the seventh century local disciplines could be written into universalizing canonical claims and could be framed in opposition to another region's practice (Nedungatt & Featherstone, 1995; Chadwick, 2003).

Nicaea II itself added a revealing complication. Pope Hadrian I supported the restoration of images, but Frankish theologians objected to the council as they understood it. Their *Opus Caroli* rejected both iconoclasm and what they believed to be excessive Greek claims for image veneration. The controversy placed Rome between Byzantium and the emerging Frankish theological world. It also demonstrated that 'the West' was no single voice. Popes could agree with Constantinople against Frankish criticism while simultaneously relying on Frankish military power. The future schism grew out of precisely such overlapping loyalties rather than a simple geographic line between two already completed denominations.

3.1 What communion and schism meant before modern denominations

To understand the later rupture, the reader must first understand what communion meant in the first millennium. It was not merely a sentiment of mutual goodwill, nor did it require identical local administration. Churches expressed communion by confessing the same apostolic faith, recognizing one another's bishops, exchanging synodical or enthronement letters, commemorating other primates in the liturgical diptychs, receiving one another's clergy and faithful, and concelebrating the Eucharist when circumstances permitted. Major disputes could interrupt one or more of these practices without immediately producing a modern denominational boundary. Communion could be impaired, suspended, restored, or disputed at different levels before an enduring separation hardened (Joint International Commission, 2016).

This helps explain why a date such as 1054 can be both genuinely important and insufficient as a complete definition of the schism. A personal or local anathema did not mechanically redraw the ecclesiastical map of Europe and the Mediterranean. Conversely, formal diplomatic contact did not prove that deeper communion was healthy. The historical task is therefore to trace changes in reciprocal recognition, jurisdiction, liturgical fellowship, doctrinal trust, and institutional memory rather than to search for one legal switch by which a single church instantly became two.

The distinction also protects the genealogy from anachronism. Medieval Christians did not inhabit a landscape of neatly bounded denominations comparable to the modern world. A Latin Christian in southern Italy, a Greek monk in Calabria, a Slavic cleric using translated Byzantine books, and a pilgrim moving between eastern and western shrines could experience ecclesial identity through overlapping languages, rites, political jurisdictions, and networks. The eventual Catholic-Orthodox boundary emerged by progressively narrowing such zones of overlap.

3.2 Which Christians this East-West story includes, and which it does not

The expression East-West Schism can mislead if 'East' is allowed to mean all eastern Christianity. By AD 787, important Christian communions were already outside the Chalcedonian ecclesial body shared by Rome and Constantinople. The Church of the East had developed its own institutional trajectory east of the Roman frontier after the fifth-century Christological conflicts, while the Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, and related Oriental Orthodox traditions had remained non-Chalcedonian after the Council of Chalcedon. Their histories were traced in the preceding chapter. They were not created by the rupture of 1054 and should not be treated as branches of Eastern Orthodoxy produced by it.

The present chapter concerns the Chalcedonian churches that still recognized communion between Old Rome and New Rome, together with the other Chalcedonian patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Those eastern patriarchates complicate a two-city narrative. By the eighth century they lived largely under Muslim political rule and cultivated Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and other Christian cultures that were neither identical with Constantinople nor simply extensions of Roman

policy. Their relative political weakness increased Constantinople's practical weight, but it did not erase their canonical identity. The 'Greek East' of later polemic was therefore internally diverse even when Constantinople became its most powerful institutional center (Chadwick, 2003; Herrin, 2008).

That wider frame matters in 1054 itself. Humbert's bull was aimed at Michael Cerularius and named associates, not at the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem or at every Christian east of the Adriatic. The later Catholic-Orthodox divide eventually encompassed a much wider set of churches, but the genealogy cannot be reconstructed responsibly by projecting that mature boundary backward onto the eleventh-century confrontation.



Figure 2. Selected centers and contact zones on the road to the Great Schism, c. AD 800-1054.

Note. Locations and arrows are schematic. Modern country borders are included only for geographic orientation and do not represent medieval political or ecclesiastical frontiers.

4. After Nicaea II: Iconoclasm Returns and Byzantine Orthodoxy Consolidates, 787-843

4.1 Nicaea II did not end iconoclasm in 787

The Council of 787 is often narrated as the final end of Byzantine iconoclasm. Historically, that is premature. Imperial policy reversed again in 815 under Leo V, beginning a second iconoclast phase. Although this later iconoclasm was generally less expansive than the earlier eighth-century conflict, it again placed icon defenders under pressure and required the Byzantine church to revisit the theological status of images. The decisive restoration came only in 843 under Empress Theodora and Patriarch Methodius. The first Sunday of Lent subsequently became the Byzantine 'Triumph of Orthodoxy,' commemorating the restoration of icons and, increasingly, the victory of accepted conciliar orthodoxy more broadly (Brubaker & Haldon, 2011; Price, 2018).

This chronology matters for East-West relations. Rome had opposed Byzantine iconoclast emperors and supported the iconophile settlement. In that sense, icon theology did not initially divide Rome from Constantinople. Yet the controversy accelerated Rome's political movement away from dependence on Byzantine imperial protection. The papacy's alliance with the Franks, already crucial against the Lombards, became more attractive as imperial religious policy in Constantinople appeared unstable. Thus an issue on which Rome and later Byzantine Orthodoxy substantially agreed nevertheless helped reconfigure the political alliances that would make later ecclesiastical conflict harder to contain (Noble, 1984; Ekonomou, 2007).

4.2 Frankish criticism and the problem of mutual interpretation

The Frankish reaction to Nicaea II illustrates a recurring problem in the genealogy of division: theologies can be separated by mistranslation without being reducible to mistranslation. The Latin version of the council available in the Frankish world

rendered important distinctions imperfectly, especially the difference between worship due to God and honor shown to images. Yet recent scholarship has emphasized that the *Opus Caroli* was not merely the product of a defective translation. It articulated a coherent Carolingian position that treated images as useful memorial and decorative objects but resisted assigning them the cultic language the Franks attributed to the Greeks. The Frankish court also had an interest in presenting itself as a competent judge of Christian orthodoxy rather than a passive receiver of Byzantine conciliar authority (Foden, 2024).

Pope Hadrian I defended the council against the Frankish critique. This is an important warning against reading the later schism backward. Around AD 800, Rome could be the ally of the Franks politically while siding with the Byzantine council theologically. The papacy's eventual Latin identity was not constructed by simple opposition to everything Greek. The roads of politics, doctrine, and liturgy crossed one another and only gradually converged into the hardened East-West identities of later centuries.

5. From Roman Primacy to Stronger Papal Jurisdiction

5.1 The older Roman inheritance: Peter, Rome, and appellate authority

The papal claims encountered in the ninth and eleventh centuries did not emerge from nothing. Rome had long occupied a place of exceptional prestige. Its church was associated with the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul; Roman bishops intervened in disputes beyond Italy; Western bishops sometimes sought Roman support; and councils such as Sardica in the fourth century had granted a limited appellate role to the bishop of Rome in certain episcopal cases. Leo I in the fifth century gave particularly forceful expression to a Petrine theology of Roman office, arguing that Peter's commission continued in the Roman see. Gelasius I at the end of the fifth century articulated a strong distinction and ordering between priestly authority and royal power. These developments supplied later popes with a substantial inherited vocabulary of primacy (Schatz, 1996; Siecienski, 2017).

Yet the meaning of that primacy was never interpreted uniformly across the Christian world. Eastern bishops could respect Rome as the first see, appeal to it in crises, and regard its doctrinal witness as exceptionally weighty without concluding that the pope possessed immediate ordinary jurisdiction over every church. Ecumenical councils were normally convened by emperors, not popes, and their authority was received through a conciliar process involving the patriarchal sees and episcopate. The 2016 Chieti document, a common Catholic-Orthodox historical statement, summarizes the first-millennium evidence with unusual precision: Rome occupied the first place in the patriarchal taxis and eastern appeals were sometimes made to the Roman see, yet such appeals did not amount to Roman canonical government over the eastern churches. The enduring disagreement concerns how that primacy should be interpreted and exercised, not whether Rome possessed an acknowledged first place (Joint International Commission, 2016).

5.2 Gregory the Great and the ambiguity of universal language

Gregory I, bishop of Rome from 590 to 604, is frequently invoked in later debates because he objected sharply when the title 'universal bishop' was associated with the patriarch of Constantinople. Gregory's letters condemn a formulation that, in his view, could imply that one bishop alone was truly bishop while the dignity of others was diminished. At the same time, Gregory exercised extensive Roman oversight, invoked Petrine responsibility, intervened across regions, and understood Rome to possess a distinctive primacy. He therefore cannot be turned into either a medieval-style papal monarch or an Orthodox polemicist against every form of Roman primacy. His position illustrates an earlier stage in which robust Roman leadership could coexist with a strong conviction that other bishops were real bearers of episcopal authority (Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum* 5.18, 5.44, 9.26; Siecienski, 2017).

That ambiguity is historically important. Later Western canonists could gather earlier Roman interventions into a more continuous theory of papal government. Eastern readers tended to interpret the same first-millennium evidence within a synodal order of patriarchs and councils. The disagreement was therefore not simply over whether Rome had primacy. It concerned the nature, source, scope, and juridical consequences of primacy.

5.3 Forged documents and real institutional change

The early medieval West also inherited documentary collections that strengthened papal claims, including the Donation of Constantine and the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals. The Donation, probably composed in the eighth century, falsely represented Constantine as granting Pope Sylvester and his successors sweeping imperial privileges in the West. The Pseudo-Isidorian collection, compiled in the ninth century, mixed authentic and forged materials and enlarged the documentary basis for clerical protections and appeals to Rome. These texts are historically important because later medieval argument could cite them as ancient evidence, but they must not be treated as the sole cause of papal primacy. Roman primatial claims demonstrably

predated them, and the institutional expansion of the papacy also depended on political alliances, reform movements, canon law, personalities, and changing structures of government (Chadwick, 2003; Siecienski, 2017).

Their presence nevertheless raises a theological problem that cannot be ignored. Ecclesiastical authority should not require fabricated evidence. A *Sola Scriptura* method therefore distinguishes between the historical existence of Roman leadership and attempts to authorize broader claims through documents that were not what they purported to be. The later exposure of such forgeries does not erase every earlier Roman claim, but it prevents an appeal to those documents from functioning as proof of divine institution.

5.4 Nicholas I and the practical expansion of Roman claims

The pontificate of Nicholas I (858-867) made the question of Roman primacy concrete in a way that earlier theoretical statements had not. Nicholas inherited a Western church in which appeals to Rome, papal decretals, Frankish political alliances, and the Pseudo-Isidorian collections could be drawn together into a more expansive account of Petrine authority. He did not invent Roman primacy, but he interpreted inherited precedents with exceptional confidence. In disputes involving bishops and rulers, Nicholas increasingly argued that the Roman see possessed authority to review episcopal judgments and to protect canonical order beyond its immediate patriarchal territory (Chadwick, 2003; Siecienski, 2017).

The conflict over the patriarchal succession in Constantinople exposed the limits of how far the East would receive those claims. When supporters of the deposed Patriarch Ignatius appealed to Rome, Nicholas did not treat the matter merely as information from another patriarchate. He investigated the case and eventually claimed the right to judge whether Photius had been canonically installed. Constantinople, by contrast, understood patriarchal succession as an eastern synodal and imperial matter in which Rome might be consulted but could not simply function as a superior court over the ecumenical patriarch. The disagreement was constitutional before it became fully doctrinal.

This point matters because later polemic often reads the ninth century through the finished systems of the thirteenth or nineteenth centuries. The historical evidence shows development on both sides. Nicholas spoke more strongly than Gregory the Great about Roman jurisdiction, while Constantinople's own self-understanding had also grown since the fourth century from a politically elevated capital see into the practical center of Byzantine ecclesiastical life. The clash was therefore between maturing ecclesiologies, not between one unchanged apostolic constitution and an entirely novel rival system.

The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals also belong in this setting, but their relation to Nicholas I requires caution. The collection combined authentic material with forged papal and conciliar texts and was already circulating in the Frankish world during Nicholas's pontificate. Material derived from the false decretals reached Rome in episcopal appeals, and historians have long debated the extent to which Nicholas knew or directly relied on the collection as a whole. It is therefore safer to say that Pseudo-Isidorian material entered the legal environment in which Roman appellate claims expanded than to make Nicholas's program depend on demonstrable systematic use of the forgery. The collection's purpose was complex, including protection of bishops from coercive metropolitan or secular interference, but its forged precedents could make papal protections and appeals appear more ancient and extensive than the genuine record warranted. Historical criticism must therefore distinguish the real prehistory of Roman primacy from documentary constructions that later reinforced it (Chadwick, 2003; Siecienski, 2017).

6. Constantinople as New Rome: Precedence, Pentarchy, and Synodal Order

Constantinople's rise created a mirror-image problem. The see that most resisted Roman universal jurisdiction had itself risen rapidly because of imperial politics. The city founded by Constantine became the eastern imperial capital, and its bishop increasingly acquired responsibilities beyond the city's original ecclesiastical rank. Constantinople I in 381 and Chalcedon in 451 provided canonical language for its precedence, explicitly connecting honor with the city's status as New Rome. This was not a timeless apostolic order. It was an institutional adaptation to imperial geography. Rome's resistance to canon 28 of Chalcedon therefore contained a legitimate historical point even when later Roman claims went beyond it: Constantinople's privileges were visibly linked to political circumstance (Dvornik, 1966).

By the early medieval period, Byzantine ecclesiology increasingly spoke in terms of a pentarchy of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The concept did not operate as a perfectly balanced constitutional system. Islamic conquest had placed Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem outside Byzantine political control, while Constantinople's imperial position made it overwhelmingly powerful in practice. Nevertheless, the pentarchic ideal provided an eastern conceptual framework in which universal order belonged to the concord of major apostolic and patriarchal sees, expressed through councils, rather than to the ordinary jurisdiction of one bishop over all others.

The resulting irony is central to the genealogy. Rome criticized Constantinople for deriving ecclesiastical rank from imperial status, while Constantinople could criticize Rome for turning Petrine precedence into monarchy. Both centers possessed

historical developments that required theological interpretation. The conflict was not between a purely biblical East and a purely political West, or vice versa. It was between different models of how apostolic continuity, canonical order, episcopal equality, regional primacy, and universal unity should relate.

6.1 Canon 28 of Chalcedon and the unresolved logic of ecclesiastical rank

The canonical controversy surrounding Constantinople reached back to Chalcedon. Canon 28 of 451 argued that because Constantinople was New Rome and the seat of imperial government, it should enjoy privileges after Old Rome and exercise metropolitan authority over specified eastern regions. The Roman legates protested the canon, and Pope Leo I refused to ratify its elevation of Constantinople, insisting that ecclesiastical rank should rest on apostolic foundation and the inherited order of sees rather than on civil importance. The dispute created a durable asymmetry: Constantinople could cite an ecumenical council for its place in the taxis, while Rome could point out that the canon's rationale was explicitly political and that papal reception had been withheld (Tanner, 1990; Siecienski, 2017).

The irony is sharpened by Rome's own history. Roman primacy was not merely political, since the city could appeal to Peter and Paul, early Christian memory, repeated interventions, and the prestige of its orthodoxy. Yet Rome's effective influence had also been strengthened by its place in the imperial capital of the West and later by political conditions that made the papacy an unusually independent institution. Constantinople, conversely, possessed no apostolic founder comparable to Peter in Roman memory, but it had become the seat of the emperor, the major eastern court, and the meeting place of bishops and theological controversies. Neither trajectory was reducible to politics, but neither was untouched by it.

By the ninth century the eastern ideal of pentarchy had developed into a theological account of universal ecclesial order. In theory, the five patriarchal sees represented the ancient centers through which catholic consensus was expressed. In practice, three of the five eastern patriarchates lived under Muslim rule, Constantinople exercised enormous practical influence, and Rome did not accept every implication of the pentarchic model. The word therefore names an important eastern ideal more reliably than it describes a balanced administrative constitution that actually functioned everywhere.

This background explains why later arguments about primacy could talk past one another. Rome asked how the church could possess visible universal unity without a final Petrine center capable of authoritative judgment. Constantinople asked how the catholicity and sacramental fullness of local churches could be preserved if one bishop possessed immediate jurisdiction over every other bishop. Both questions address real ecclesiological problems. The historical rift widened because East and West developed different answers before they possessed a common vocabulary for distinguishing primacy, presidency, appeal, jurisdiction, reception, and conciliarity.

6.2 Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and the limits of a two-center model

The other eastern patriarchates prevent the history from being reduced to a bilateral contest between two sovereign ecclesiastical blocs. Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem retained ancient prestige and canonical rank, but after the Arab conquests they operated under political conditions radically different from those of Constantinople. Their bishops and communities negotiated taxation, legal minority status, linguistic change, and the coexistence of rival Christian communions. Greek-speaking Chalcedonian Christians in these regions increasingly shared space with Arabic-speaking Christian cultures, while Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian traditions followed their own non-Chalcedonian trajectories.

This changed the balance of the pentarchy. Constantinople possessed the emperor, court, major synods, and the institutional resources of the Byzantine capital, whereas the eastern patriarchs beyond the empire could not exercise comparable political leverage. Their relative weakness made Constantinople the practical voice most often encountered by Rome, but canonical theory still treated them as patriarchal sees rather than suffragans of New Rome. This gap between pentarchic ideal and geopolitical reality is one reason both Roman and Constantinopolitan claims could appear more universal in practice than the older five-see model suggested.

The distinction also matters for later memory. The durable Orthodox communion that emerged from the Byzantine sphere was broader than the patriarchate of Constantinople, just as the Latin West was broader than the city of Rome. Yet neither side in the ninth to eleventh centuries constituted a perfectly centralized block. The schism hardened through networks of churches whose relation to their leading sees varied, and that institutional plurality should remain visible in any genealogy of the division.

ANALYTICAL KEY: PRIMACY WAS NOT THE SAME QUESTION AS PAPAL MONARCHY

The first millennium supplies substantial evidence for Roman precedence and for appeals to Rome. It also supplies substantial evidence for conciliar government, autonomous regional synods, and major eastern sees that did not act as though the pope exercised routine immediate jurisdiction over every local church. The later Catholic-Orthodox disagreement is therefore not adequately described as 'primacy versus no primacy.' The deeper question is what kind of primacy Scripture and the early church warrant, how it relates to the authority of other bishops, and whether it includes universal ordinary jurisdiction.

7. Charlemagne and the Emergence of Two Christian Roman Empires

7.1 Rome turns toward the Franks

The papacy's political reorientation toward the Franks was one of the most consequential non-doctrinal causes of East-West estrangement. Byzantine power in central Italy had weakened, the Lombards threatened Rome, and imperial iconoclasm had damaged trust. Pepin the Short and then Charlemagne supplied the military partnership the papacy needed. The result was not an immediate ecclesiastical break with Constantinople, but it changed the political imagination of the West. The pope increasingly operated within a Latin-Frankish world whose rulers could claim responsibility for protecting, reforming, and even judging the conditions of the Western church (Noble, 1984; Osborne, 2020).

On Christmas Day 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor in St Peter's. The precise intentions of pope and king remain debated, but the symbolic consequence was unmistakable. The West now possessed a ruler who could be styled Roman emperor even though an emperor already reigned from Constantinople. Byzantine observers did not simply accept the implication that Roman imperial legitimacy had been transferred to a Frankish court. After negotiation, Byzantium recognized Charlemagne's imperial title in the early ninth century without conceding an uncomplicated transfer of Roman identity. Political theology now gave Christians in East and West rival centers of 'Roman' legitimacy (McKitterick, 2008; Osborne, 2020).

7.2 Political rivalry becomes theological rivalry

Carolingian religious policy intensified the problem because the Frankish court presented itself as a guardian of orthodoxy. Its scholars criticized the Byzantine understanding of icons, promoted the Filioque, pursued ecclesiastical reform, and built an intellectual culture increasingly independent of Greek theological authority. The point is not that Charlemagne invented the future schism. Rather, the existence of two imperial Christian worlds made ecclesiastical disagreements easier to nationalize and politicize. A dispute over a Greek council could become a test of Frankish theological maturity; a disagreement over the creed could become entangled with claims to Roman imperial legitimacy.

The coronation of 800 also altered papal-Byzantine relations. Rome was no longer merely a western see within an eastern Roman political order. The papacy possessed an alternative imperial protector and a growing territorial base in central Italy. Constantinople, in turn, increasingly experienced Latin Christianity through Frankish and later German institutions whose customs differed more markedly from Byzantine practice than the older Greek-speaking communities of southern Italy or the long bilingual culture of Rome. Political distance thus accelerated cultural distance.

7.3 Aachen, orthodoxy, and the politics of creedal guardianship

The Council of Aachen in 809 illustrates how imperial rivalry and doctrinal formulation became entangled. Carolingian theologians had come to regard the Filioque as a necessary expression of Trinitarian orthodoxy. Their use of the phrase was not simply an anti-Greek invention. It drew on long Western traditions shaped by Augustine, Latin anti-Arian theology, and Iberian creedal practice. Yet under Charlemagne it also became part of a Frankish program that claimed the right to judge the theological adequacy of Byzantine formulations. A theological inheritance was being mobilized within a new imperial competition (Siecienski, 2010; Webb, 2025).

Pope Leo III's response is especially instructive because it resists a simple East-versus-West narrative. Leo appears to have accepted the theology the Franks intended by the Filioque while refusing to authorize alteration of the ecumenical Creed. Later tradition remembered him as displaying the Creed in Greek and Latin at Rome without the addition. Whatever the precise details of that symbolic act, the broader point is secure: papal Rome in the early ninth century did not yet treat creedal insertion as necessary even while Western theologians defended the doctrine (Siecienski, 2010; Chadwick, 2003).

Aachen therefore reveals three separable questions that later polemic often fused. Is the underlying theological proposition defensible? May a regional church confess that proposition in catechesis or theology? May that church unilaterally alter the

text of a creed received as ecumenical? The first is exegetical and dogmatic; the second concerns legitimate theological diversity; the third concerns catholic authority and the limits of regional action. By 1054, East and West often argued all three questions at once, making compromise much harder.

8. The Filioque: From Theological Formula to Ecclesial Boundary

8.1 What the original Creed said

The creed received at Constantinople in 381 confessed the Holy Spirit as 'the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.' The wording echoes [John 15:26](#), where Jesus says that the Spirit of truth 'proceeds from the Father.' The Greek verb in the creed, *ekporeuesthai*, came to carry a relatively specific theological sense in the East: the Spirit's hypostatic origin is from the Father, who is the single source or *arche* within the Trinity. The original ecumenical text contained no phrase 'and the Son.' That historical fact is not disputed.

The Latin West nevertheless developed language that related the Spirit's eternal procession to both Father and Son. Augustine's Trinitarian theology was especially influential, although he did not insert a new phrase into the creed. Latin *processio* had a broader semantic range than Greek *ekporeusis*. Western theologians could therefore speak of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son while maintaining that the Father is the font of deity. The later controversy became difficult partly because identical-looking translations did not carry identical technical meanings (Siecienski, 2010).

8.2 Spain, the Carolingians, Leo III, and Rome

The phrase *Filioque*, 'and the Son,' entered Western creedal usage gradually. It was associated with anti-Arian confession in Visigothic Spain and spread through parts of the Frankish world. By the early ninth century Carolingian theologians were defending both the doctrine and the creedal wording. The Council of Aachen in 809 supported the *Filioque* and sent representatives to Pope Leo III. Leo agreed with the theological substance but resisted altering the ecumenical creed. Later tradition records his display of the creed in Greek and Latin without the addition. This distinction between accepting a Western theological formula and altering the conciliar text is essential: even within the West, doctrine and liturgical interpolation were not initially treated as the same question (Siecienski, 2010; Chadwick, 2003).

Rome itself did not incorporate the *Filioque* into the sung Creed at Mass until 1014, under Pope Benedict VIII and in the context of Emperor Henry II's visit. By then the addition had become normal in much of the Latin West. What had begun as a regional Western clarification was now present in the liturgical confession of the Roman see. From an eastern perspective, the issue therefore became inseparably theological and canonical. The West was not only interpreting Trinitarian doctrine differently; it had modified a creed established by ecumenical councils without a new ecumenical council accepted by East and West.

8.3 The theological arguments in their strongest form

The strongest Western argument sought to protect the unity and consubstantial communion of Father, Son, and Spirit. Scripture speaks of the 'Spirit of the Son' ([Galatians 4:6](#)), the 'Spirit of Christ' ([Romans 8:9](#)), and the risen Christ breathing the Spirit upon the disciples ([John 20:22](#)). Jesus says that the Spirit will take from what is his and glorify him ([John 16:13-15](#)). Western theology reasoned that the Spirit's relation to the Son is not merely temporal mission but reflects eternal Trinitarian communion. Properly qualified, Latin theology did not intend to posit two independent sources of the Spirit. The Father remained the first origin, and the Son's role was understood within the one divine essence received from the Father (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1995; Siecienski, 2010).

The strongest Eastern argument began with the Father's monarchy. [John 15:26](#) explicitly names the Father as the one from whom the Spirit proceeds. The Eastern tradition feared that making the Son a second cause of the Spirit's hypostatic existence would compromise the Father's unique personal property and blur the distinctions among the divine persons. Eastern theologians could affirm that the Spirit is eternally manifested or given through the Son and that the Son is inseparable from the Spirit's mission, while still refusing to say that the Spirit has hypostatic origin 'from the Son' in the same way he is from the Father. Photius made this objection central in the ninth century (Photius, *Mystagogy*; Siecienski, 2010).

The debate therefore contains both a substantive question and a linguistic one. It would be inaccurate to say that the controversy is only semantic, because the relation of Father, Son, and Spirit is genuinely at stake. It would also be inaccurate to treat Latin and Greek formulas as if their technical verbs were exact equivalents. Modern Catholic clarification explicitly distinguishes Greek *ekporeusis* from broader Latin *processio* and affirms the Father as the Trinitarian source, demonstrating that later official Catholic theology does not understand the *Filioque* as two independent principles of the Spirit (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1995).

8.3.1 Maximus the Confessor and an earlier bridge between Greek and Latin speech

A seventh-century witness shows that the later opposition was not the only possible way to interpret Latin language. Maximus the Confessor, a Greek theologian who had lived in the West, explained the Roman formula to Eastern critics in his Letter to Marinus. According to Maximus, the Latins did not make the Son the cause of the Spirit. They knew the Father to be the one cause within the Godhead, while speaking of the Spirit's eternal manifestation or coming forth through the Son. Modern scholarship has repeatedly identified this passage as evidence that a Greek theologian could interpret Western language in a way compatible with the Father's unique causal monarchy (Siecienski, 2010).

Maximus does not automatically solve the later controversy. The theology of the Latin West continued to develop, and the Greek terms used by Photius in the ninth century carried more specific causal implications than the Latin *processio* necessarily did. Yet the passage demonstrates that the semantic worlds of East and West once overlapped enough for a charitable translation to be possible. That historical fact is important: the Filioque became church-dividing not simply because two irreconcilable biblical doctrines had always existed, but because inherited formulas, linguistic distinctions, creedal procedure, and ecclesial mistrust hardened around them.

The New Testament itself requires a theology broad enough to honor all the relevant texts. The Spirit proceeds from the Father in [John 15:26](#); the Son sends the Spirit from the Father in the same verse; Jesus promises to send the Counselor in [John 16:7](#); and the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ or of the Son in [Romans 8:9](#) and [Galatians 4:6](#). The biblical task is therefore not to choose between Father and Son as though one must be excluded. It is to preserve the Father's unique identity as Father while confessing the Son's eternal and saving relation to the Spirit without positing two independent divine sources. Later formulas must be judged by how faithfully they serve that scriptural synthesis.

8.4 The question of authority behind the question of wording

The ecclesiological problem was at least as consequential as the pneumatological one. Who possessed authority to alter a creed received from an ecumenical council? The East could accept theological explanation without accepting unilateral textual modification. Rome eventually defended the Western formula, but the earlier resistance of Leo III to inserting it shows that concern about conciliar integrity was not exclusively Greek. The Ravenna dialogue document later stated the underlying principle in historically careful form: the faith of the local church should not be modified in isolation from the universal communion, and the first millennium treated ecumenical councils as privileged instruments of universal conciliarity (Joint International Commission, 2007).

This is why the Filioque cannot be ranked as either the sole cause of the schism or a minor pretext. In 1054, immediate quarrels centered heavily on rite, authority, and the treatment of Latins, and Whalen's reconstruction shows that the Filioque entered the legatine polemic in a particularly distorted accusation that the Greeks had removed it from the creed (Whalen, 2007). Yet the ninth-century Photian controversy and Rome's adoption of the phrase in 1014 had already made the issue a durable symbol of two different ways of understanding doctrinal development and universal authority.

Table 2. The Filioque controversy: doctrine, language, and authority

Dimension	Western / Latin emphasis	Eastern / Greek emphasis or issue
Ecumenical text of 381	The Spirit "proceeds from the Father".	Shared historical starting point; no Filioque in the Greek conciliar text.
Latin Western concern	Spirit is eternally related to Father and Son; Son is not a second independent source.	Protects consubstantial communion and biblical "Spirit of the Son/Christ" language.
Greek Eastern concern	Father is the unique hypostatic source; Spirit proceeds from Father and is manifested/given through Son.	Protects monarchy of Father and personal distinctions.
Linguistic issue	Latin <i>processio</i> is broader than Greek <i>ekporeusis</i> .	Mechanical translation can exaggerate or conceal real differences.
Canonical issue	West gradually inserts Filioque into Creed; Rome does so in 1014.	East objects that an ecumenical creed cannot be altered unilaterally.
Biblical question	How should John 15:26 be integrated with John 16:13-15; 20:22; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6?	Requires synthesis without overriding explicit scriptural language by later formula alone.

9. The Photian Controversy: A Schism Rehearsed and Healed

9.1 Ignatius, Photius, and a disputed patriarchal succession

The ninth-century crisis surrounding Photius was the most important rehearsal for the later schism because it combined nearly every major East-West fault line. In 858 Patriarch Ignatius of Constantinople was removed or compelled to resign amid court conflict. Photius, a distinguished scholar and layman, was rapidly advanced through clerical orders and installed as patriarch. His learning and eventual theological significance are not in dispute, but the manner of his elevation created a canonical dispute. Supporters of Ignatius appealed to Rome, giving Pope Nicholas I an opportunity to intervene in the internal succession of Constantinople.

Nicholas initially sent legates to investigate. After they recognized Photius, the pope rejected their decision and in 863 declared Photius deposed while supporting Ignatius. From Rome's perspective, the bishop of Rome possessed authority to adjudicate the legitimacy of a patriarchal succession. From Constantinople's perspective, Roman action was increasingly experienced as an intrusion into a matter already handled within the imperial and eastern ecclesiastical order. The controversy thus transformed an internal Byzantine dispute into a test case for the scope of papal jurisdiction (Dvornik, 1948; Chadwick, 2003).

9.2 Bulgaria: local agency inside a jurisdictional contest

Bulgaria turned the succession dispute into a contest over the Christian map of Europe. Khan Boris I accepted baptism in the 860s but sought the greatest possible ecclesiastical autonomy and maneuvered between Constantinople and Rome. Byzantine mission had initiated the conversion, yet Boris sent questions to Pope Nicholas I in 866 and invited Latin clergy. Nicholas' *Responsa ad consulta Bulgarorum* offered detailed answers on Christian practice and discipline. The episode is sometimes narrated as if Bulgaria were a passive prize in a Roman-Byzantine struggle. In reality Boris exploited the rivalry to seek an archbishop and institutional independence for his kingdom.

The competing missions nevertheless exposed concrete differences. Latin missionaries criticized aspects of Byzantine discipline, including married clergy and other customs. Photius responded that the Latins were introducing irregular practices and, most importantly, the Filioque. Jurisdiction, rite, mission, and theology now reinforced one another. The question 'Who will organize the Bulgarian church?' became inseparable from the question 'Whose doctrinal and canonical order defines catholic Christianity?'

9.3 The rupture of 867 and the councils of 869-870 and 879-880

In 867 Photius convened a council that condemned Nicholas and attacked Latin innovations, with the Filioque occupying a prominent place. Before the conflict could stabilize, Byzantine politics changed dramatically. Basil I seized the throne, deposed Photius, and restored Ignatius. The council of 869-870 condemned Photius; the Roman Catholic tradition later counted this gathering as the eighth ecumenical council, while the Orthodox tradition did not. The fact that East and West would later disagree over which ninth-century council carries ecumenical authority is itself evidence that conciliar reception had become part of the division.

The story did not end there. After Ignatius died in 877, Photius returned as patriarch. A council in Constantinople in 879-880, attended by papal legates, restored communion and reversed key elements of the prior settlement. Pope John VIII accepted a reconciliation, although later interpretations of the council and of the precise conditions of papal approval became contested. The essential historical point is secure: the Photian rupture was healed. Rome and Constantinople could still restore communion after reciprocal condemnations and deep disagreement (Dvornik, 1948; Chadwick, 2003).

This healed schism is a crucial control for interpreting 1054. If the ninth-century crisis had automatically created a permanent Catholic-Orthodox separation, later communion would be inexplicable. Instead, it revealed the unresolved issues that could generate future rupture: papal appellate claims, patriarchal autonomy, missionary jurisdiction, Filioque, and the reception of councils. The wound closed, but the underlying constitutional disagreement remained.

9.4 The Photian crisis as a constitutional rehearsal for 1054

The Photian controversy deserves more than the label 'first schism' because it rehearsed nearly every structural issue that would reappear in the eleventh century. A contested patriarchal succession raised the question of whether Rome possessed final appellate jurisdiction over Constantinople. The Bulgarian mission raised the question of patriarchal boundaries. Frankish use of the Filioque raised the question of whether a Western doctrinal formula could be imposed within the shared Creed. Imperial intervention raised the question of whether emperors could remove and restore patriarchs. Finally, the rival councils

of 869-870 and 879-880 raised the question of how a later synod could reverse or reinterpret the reception of an earlier one (Dvornik, 1948; Chadwick, 2003).

The council of 869-870, later numbered the Eighth Ecumenical Council in Roman Catholic reckoning, condemned Photius after Basil I restored Ignatius. Yet after Ignatius died in 877, Photius returned to the patriarchate, and Pope John VIII sought reconciliation. The council of 879-880 received papal legates, restored communion, and repudiated the earlier personal rupture. Eastern Orthodox tradition commonly regards this later synod as the authoritative settlement, while the Latin West eventually retained 869-870 in its ecumenical list. The divergent reception of the two councils itself became evidence of a deeper problem: East and West were no longer always using the same mechanisms to decide which council had universal authority (Chadwick, 2003; Meijer, 1975).

The council of 879-880 also matters because it shows that schism was not yet irreversible. Less than two decades after Nicholas I and Photius had exchanged condemnations, papal legates and the Constantinopolitan church could restore communion. The lesson is historically sobering. Strong words, even anathemas, did not automatically create permanent denominational separation. What made later division durable was the cumulative loss of the political, linguistic, and ecclesial habits that had previously allowed reconciliation.

Modern scholarship has also dismantled the older Western legend of Photius as a uniquely unscrupulous usurper who single-handedly split Christendom. That legend cannot survive close reading of the succession crisis, imperial politics, Ignatian opposition, Roman intervention, and the eventual papal reconciliation. Photius was a brilliant and polemical theologian who pressed eastern objections sharply, but the conflict was systemic. Assigning the schism to his personality obscures the constitutional questions that outlived him (Dvornik, 1948).

10. Missionary Competition and the Christianization of Eastern Europe

10.1 Moravia and the mission of Cyril and Methodius

The missions of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius show why East-West relations cannot be narrated only as rivalry. In 863, at the request of the Moravian ruler Rastislav, the Byzantine emperor sent the brothers to Great Moravia. Constantine devised the Glagolitic alphabet and, with Methodius and collaborators, translated biblical and liturgical texts into Slavonic. Their work challenged the assumption among some Frankish clergy that Latin, Greek, and Hebrew possessed uniquely privileged liturgical status. The mission was simultaneously religious, cultural, and geopolitical because Moravian rulers were seeking greater independence from Frankish ecclesiastical control (Vlasto, 1970; Obolensky, 1971).

Yet Cyril and Methodius did not simply lead an anti-Roman Byzantine mission. They traveled to Rome, where Pope Hadrian II approved Slavonic liturgical books and ordained disciples. Methodius later served as a papally recognized archbishop and legate. Pope John VIII renewed approval of Slavonic liturgy in 880. The episode demonstrates that Rome and Constantinople could still cooperate in mission even when competing jurisdictions surrounded the same territory. It also shows that local language and culture were not inherently aligned with one ecclesial center.

10.2 Bulgaria, the disciples of Methodius, and the creation of a Slavic Christian sphere

After Methodius died in 885, opponents of the Slavonic mission expelled or marginalized many of his disciples from Moravia. Several found refuge in Bulgaria, where rulers sponsored Slavic literary culture. In the Bulgarian environment, the mission's linguistic legacy expanded dramatically. The Cyrillic script emerged after Cyril's death, probably in the Bulgarian literary centers associated especially with Preslav, drawing on Greek letter forms while serving Slavonic language. It is therefore historically inaccurate to say simply that Cyril personally invented Cyrillic. His direct creation was Glagolitic; Cyrillic developed from the wider school formed by the brothers' mission and disciples (Curta, 2006).

Bulgaria eventually entered the Byzantine ecclesiastical sphere, but only after prolonged negotiation. The outcome strengthened Constantinople's influence in the Balkans while preserving a distinctive Slavic Christian culture. The later medieval map of Orthodoxy was therefore neither purely Greek nor merely imposed from Constantinople. It was created through translation, local political agency, monastic networks, and the adaptation of Byzantine Christianity to Slavic societies.

10.3 Poland, Hungary, and Rus: rival spheres take shape

By the late tenth century, the missionary map of Europe increasingly aligned political frontiers with Latin and Byzantine ecclesial networks. The baptism of Mieszko I of Poland in 966 linked his polity to Latin Christianity. Hungary's consolidation under Stephen I around the turn of the millennium similarly connected it to Rome and Western episcopal organization. These decisions were not inevitable products of geography; rulers used Christian affiliation to build states, negotiate alliances, and shape cultural identity.

The conversion of Vladimir of Kyiv in 988 had even larger long-term consequences. Byzantine Christianity became the principal ecclesiastical tradition of Rus, bringing Greek-derived liturgy, Slavic texts, episcopal structures, and monastic ideals northward. The later Orthodox worlds of Kyiv, Rus, and associated eastern Slavic cultures developed from this Byzantine-Slavic synthesis. By the early eleventh century, then, Latin and Byzantine Christianity were not only different cultures around the Mediterranean. They were becoming expansive civilizational networks with distinct but overlapping geographies. The 1054 conflict would therefore acquire significance far beyond Rome and Constantinople.

10.4 Local rulers were not passive pieces on a Rome-Constantinople chessboard

The language of 'missionary competition' can mislead if it turns Slavic rulers and communities into passive territory fought over by two older centers. Boris of Bulgaria, Rastislav of Moravia, Vladimir of Rus, and other rulers pursued their own dynastic, diplomatic, linguistic, and ecclesiastical objectives. They requested missionaries, negotiated jurisdiction, sought native clergy, balanced neighboring powers, and used Christian institutions in the construction of political order. Rome and Constantinople competed, but local actors shaped the terms under which Christianity became rooted (Obolensky, 1971; Curta, 2006).

This local agency also explains why political alignment did not always produce simple ritual uniformity. Slavic Christianity developed forms that were neither a mere copy of Greek Constantinople nor a Latin transplant. Old Church Slavonic created a transregional literary world. Bulgarian centers generated new textual traditions. Rus received Byzantine liturgy while developing its own political and ecclesiastical structures. Western Slavic and Hungarian churches entered Latin networks while retaining local customs. Genealogy therefore requires more precision than drawing a line on a map and labeling everything east of it 'Byzantine' and everything west of it 'Roman.'

Even so, the missions had long-term consequences for the future ecclesiastical map. Once episcopal structures, liturgical books, educational networks, and political alliances had been established within one tradition, later generations inherited a default orientation. By the eleventh century those orientations increasingly overlapped with linguistic and geopolitical frontiers. The Great Schism did not create Eastern and Western Europe, but it gradually gave ecclesiastical form to divisions that missions had helped organize.

11. Liturgical, Disciplinary, and Canonical Divergences

11.1 Leavened and unleavened Eucharistic bread

The controversy over Eucharistic bread became one of the immediate triggers of the 1054 crisis. The Latin West ordinarily used unleavened bread, azymes, connecting the Last Supper closely with Passover chronology and inherited Western practice. The Byzantine East used leavened bread, often investing its risen character with symbolic meaning. Neither practice by itself necessarily entails a different doctrine of Christ's presence or the validity of the Eucharist. Ancient Christian practice had not been geographically uniform enough to make one type of bread a simple apostolic boundary marker.

By the eleventh century, however, difference had become polemical identity. Eastern critics accused Latins of Judaizing or symbolically denying the risen life of Christ by using unleavened bread. Latin writers defended azymes as lawful and ancient. The historical lesson is important: a practice can move from legitimate regional custom to a test of orthodoxy when communities stop distinguishing apostolic essentials from inherited discipline. Whalen's study of 1054 shows that azymes and the status of the Latin rite were at the center of the immediate conflict, especially in the mixed Greek-Latin environment of southern Italy (Whalen, 2007).

11.2 Clerical marriage and continence

Clerical discipline developed differently in East and West. The Byzantine canonical tradition permitted married men to be ordained as presbyters and deacons and to continue marital life, with periods of abstinence connected to liturgical service, while bishops were chosen from celibate clergy or monks. The Latin West moved increasingly toward required continence and eventually universal celibacy for priests in its canonical system, although implementation was uneven for centuries. The Quinisext Council's canon 13 had already framed the difference explicitly by rejecting the Roman requirement as a universal rule for married presbyters and deacons (Nedungatt & Featherstone, 1995).

Scripture makes this an especially revealing example. The Pastoral Epistles assume that an overseer may be 'the husband of one wife' and govern a household well ([1 Timothy 3:2-5](#)), while Paul also praises celibacy as a gift that can facilitate undivided service ([1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-35](#)). The New Testament therefore permits celibacy without making it the universal condition of presbyteral ministry. The East-West controversy illustrates how an ascetical discipline can be spiritually serious without becoming a necessary mark of apostolic legitimacy.

11.3 Fasting, liturgical language, confirmation, and local custom

Other differences accumulated around fasting days, the timing and administration of confirmation or chrismation, liturgical language, forms of chant, vesture, beards, and ritual detail. Latin Christianity increasingly developed a canon-law culture organized around papal decretals and Western collections, while Byzantium integrated conciliar canons, imperial legislation, and patriarchal practice through nomocanonical traditions. None of these differences alone required schism. Christianity had always contained regional diversity. The problem arose when custom was universalized and the other tradition's custom was recoded as disobedience or heresy.

Language magnified misunderstanding. Greek literacy declined in much of the Latin West, and Latin competence diminished in the Greek East. Theological texts therefore circulated through fewer capable interpreters. Terms with long technical histories were flattened in translation. Polemical summaries became easier to repeat than the strongest arguments of the other side. The physical distance between the two intellectual worlds was less important than the shrinking number of people who could inhabit both.

Table 3. Major East-West divergences visible by the eleventh century

Issue	Latin West	Byzantine East
Universal authority	Stronger Petrine claims for Roman see; growing appellate and universal jurisdictional language.	Rome first in order/honor acknowledged, but universal government located in synodal and conciliar order of bishops/patriarchs.
Filioque	Common in Western Creed; Rome adopts liturgically in 1014.	Original 381 wording retained; theological and canonical objections to addition.
Eucharistic bread	Unleavened bread becomes normal.	Leavened bread becomes normal.
Clerical discipline	Increasing requirement of clerical continence/celebrity.	Married presbyters/deacons permitted after marriage before ordination; bishops celibate.
Fasting	Distinct Western fasting customs, including Saturday practices in some periods.	Quinisext tradition criticizes certain Roman Saturday fasting customs.
Canon law	Growing papal decretal collections and Western canonical synthesis.	Conciliar canons, patriarchal practice, and imperial-ecclesiastical nomocanonical tradition.
Imperial relationship	Papal alliance with Frankish/German emperors; papal territorial and reforming independence grows.	Patriarchate remains embedded in Byzantine imperial political world.
Missionary spheres	Latin networks expand in Poland, Hungary, western Slavic lands.	Byzantine-Slavic networks expand in Bulgaria, Rus, and eastern Balkans.

12. The Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries: Estrangement without a Clean Break

The decades after the Photian reconciliation did not produce a straight line toward 1054. Relations fluctuated. The Roman papacy passed through periods of intense aristocratic control and institutional weakness, while Byzantium experienced the Macedonian revival, missionary expansion, and political transformation. These internal developments mattered because the capacity of one side to understand and negotiate with the other depended on who actually governed Rome or Constantinople at a given moment. A strong universal papal monarchy was not operating continuously from late antiquity to 1054; its authority expanded unevenly and would accelerate especially in the reform movement of the mid-eleventh century and afterward.

The Western imperial title also persisted. Otto I's coronation as emperor in 962 created what historians later call the Holy Roman Empire, renewing the Western claim to Roman Christian empire in a German political setting. Byzantine observers could negotiate diplomatically with western emperors without accepting their self-understanding as identical to the Roman basileus in Constantinople. Political rivalry was therefore institutionalized long before the 1054 theological confrontation.

At the same time, contact zones remained real. Southern Italy contained Latin and Greek monasteries, clergy, liturgies, and jurisdictions. Merchants and pilgrims crossed the Mediterranean. The papacy and Byzantium could cooperate when shared interests required it. This is precisely why the Norman conquest of southern Italy became so destabilizing. It disrupted a region where Latin and Greek Christianity had coexisted and gave Rome and Constantinople reasons both to compete and to seek alliance. The 1054 crisis emerged from this unstable frontier rather than from abstract theology alone (Whalen, 2007).

12.1 Papal weakness, reform, and the paradox of institutional acceleration

The history of Roman primacy in the tenth century cautions against imagining an uninterrupted march toward centralized papal monarchy. Roman aristocratic factions, disputed elections, imperial intervention, and short pontificates could make the papacy institutionally fragile. Some popes exercised little effective influence beyond Rome. The universal claims preserved in

papal theory therefore exceeded what the institution could always enforce in practice. That distinction between claim and capacity is essential for reconstructing development honestly.

The eleventh-century reform movement changed that relationship. Monastic and clerical reformers opposed simony, sought stricter clerical discipline, revived canonical learning, and increasingly treated Rome as the center from which reform could be coordinated. Emperor Henry III's intervention at Sutri in 1046 helped resolve a crisis of rival papal claimants, but the reformers who followed also developed institutions that would eventually reduce secular control over papal elections. Leo IX's traveling synods, legations, reform program, and international circle of advisers belong to this transitional phase. The papacy that sent Humbert to Constantinople in 1054 was therefore more self-conscious, more activist, and more jurisdictionally ambitious than Rome had often been a century earlier (Miller, 2016; Siecienski, 2017).

This institutional acceleration helps explain the temperature of the encounter with Constantinople. A reforming papacy increasingly believed that Roman correction of abuses was a service owed to the universal church. Byzantine ecclesiology could interpret the same behavior as an illegitimate extension of Western jurisdiction into another patriarchate. Each side could therefore understand its own action as defense of catholic order and the other's as aggression. The issue was not merely pride. It was a clash between different institutional logics that had matured in different political worlds.

The reform movement also intensified Western clerical continence and canonical uniformity. Practices that had once varied more widely could now be treated as markers of proper order. This matters for East-West relations because the Byzantine church had preserved a stable discipline permitting married men to be ordained to the presbyterate while requiring bishops to be celibate. Western reformers increasingly regarded their own stricter discipline as a normative ecclesiastical standard. The more each side universalized its regional practice, the more ordinary diversity could be interpreted as defect.

13. Leo IX, Michael Cerularius, and the Crisis of 1053-1054

13.1 The reforming papacy and the Norman problem

Leo IX, pope from 1049 to 1054, belonged to the early reforming papacy that preceded the Gregorian Reform. He traveled widely, held reform synods, challenged simony and clerical abuses, used legates energetically, and asserted Roman authority with unusual vigor. His pontificate therefore marks an institutional transition. The papacy was beginning to act less as a predominantly local Roman office with broad prestige and more as a mobile center of reforming government for Latin Christendom. That renewal helped prepare the later medieval papal monarchy even though the full Gregorian program still lay ahead (Siecienski, 2017).

The immediate political context was the Norman advance in southern Italy. Byzantine and papal interests were both threatened by Norman power, creating reasons for alliance. Yet the same region contained Greek and Latin ecclesiastical customs whose treatment became a source of grievance. The crisis was therefore paradoxical: Rome and Constantinople had political incentives to cooperate at the moment when disputes over rite and jurisdiction made cooperation increasingly difficult.

13.2 Leo of Ohrid, azymes, and the widening polemic

Around 1053, at the request or with the encouragement of Patriarch Michael Cerularius, Leo of Ohrid wrote to John of Trani criticizing Latin practices, especially the use of unleavened bread. Humbert of Silva Candida translated the letter into Latin and brought it into the papal circle. Reports also circulated that Latin churches in Constantinople had been pressured or closed and that Latin customs had been condemned. What began as a disciplinary and ritual controversy rapidly became an argument over who had authority to define catholic practice (Whalen, 2007).

The rhetoric on both sides was harsh and historically unreliable. Latin polemic could portray Greek practices as deviations, while eastern polemic could treat Latin azymes or fasting as evidence of corruption. Such arguments illustrate a recurring pathology of schism: once trust erodes, the existence of difference becomes evidence of bad faith. Practices that earlier centuries had tolerated can be redescribed as proof that the other communion has ceased to be fully Christian.

13.3 The legation of Humbert and the death of Leo IX

Leo IX sent a legation to Constantinople consisting of Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, Frederick of Lorraine, and Peter of Amalfi. Emperor Constantine IX received the envoys because he still desired Western cooperation against the Normans. Cerularius, however, resisted their claims and style of negotiation. Humbert was a learned reformer and a forceful advocate of Roman authority, but not a conciliatory diplomat. The encounter quickly became an exchange of accusations rather than a joint search for settlement.

A major canonical complication followed when Leo IX died on 19 April 1054 while the legation was still in the East. The later rule that a legation ordinarily lapses with the death of the commissioning pope should not be projected backward without

qualification, because eleventh-century legatine law was less systematized. Even so, the papal vacancy deprived the envoys of the possibility of receiving fresh instructions from the pontiff whose mandate they carried and has led historians to debate the standing of Humbert's final act. The envoys continued their mission, but the circumstance is another reason the bull cannot simply be treated as an uncontested judgment by a living pope against the whole eastern church.

13.4 16 July 1054: the bull on the altar of Hagia Sophia

On 16 July 1054, after negotiations had collapsed, Humbert and his companions entered Hagia Sophia and placed a bull of excommunication on the altar. The document targeted Cerularius and named supporters rather than issuing a juridically precise excommunication of every eastern Christian. Its catalogue of accusations was polemical and included claims that do not withstand historical scrutiny. Most strikingly, the Latins accused the Greeks of having removed the Filioque from the Creed, reversing the actual history: the original conciliar text lacked the phrase and the West had added it (Whalen, 2007).

The symbolic violence of the gesture was nevertheless profound. Hagia Sophia was the liturgical heart of imperial Constantinople. Placing a condemnation on its altar turned a diplomatic-theological breakdown into public ecclesiastical theater. The legates departed the city convinced that they had defended Roman authority. Cerularius convened the resident synod on 20 July, and the condemnation of the legates and their bull was publicly promulgated on 24 July. The two acts supplied later historians with the dramatic date of the Great Schism.

13.5 What the censures did not do

The exchange did not formally excommunicate two entire communions in the modern sense. The joint Catholic-Orthodox declaration of 1965 stated that the censures were directed against particular persons, not against the churches themselves, and that their authors did not foresee the full rupture that later developed. This retrospective judgment is not merely diplomatic courtesy. It corresponds to the historical evidence that relations and sacramental boundaries did not change everywhere on a single day in July 1054 (Paul VI & Athenagoras I, 1965).

Nor did ordinary Christians across Europe immediately awaken to a new denominational map. Many local communities had little direct knowledge of the event. Greek and Latin Christians continued to encounter one another in pilgrimage, trade, monastic settings, and frontier regions. Later crusading, jurisdictional conflict, and polemical theology would give 1054 a meaning far larger than contemporaries assigned to it. The date is therefore best described as a conventional milestone: historically real and symbolically important, but not a self-sufficient explanation of the schism.

13.6 After July 1054: no universal switch was thrown

The weeks after the exchange of censures did not produce a coordinated empire-wide decree announcing two separate churches. The Byzantine emperor had initially sought cooperation with Rome; eastern patriarchates were not parties to Humbert's act; the papacy itself was vacant during the decisive July confrontation; and local Christians across the Mediterranean continued patterns of contact that did not conform neatly to a new confessional frontier. The event was serious, but its immediate institutional reach was narrower than the later phrase 'mutual excommunication of East and West' suggests (Whalen, 2007; Paul VI & Athenagoras I, 1965).

The meaning of 1054 grew through retrospective accumulation. Subsequent papal and patriarchal conflicts were remembered in light of it. The Crusades brought large Latin armies into the eastern Mediterranean. Latin hierarchies were established in territories with existing Greek bishops. Mutual stereotypes hardened. The capture and sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204, and the establishment of a Latin patriarchate in the Byzantine capital, transformed ecclesiological disagreement into a traumatic historical memory that no eleventh-century bull alone could have produced. For that reason, many historians speak of a process of schism rather than a single schism event (Chadwick, 2003; Papadakis, 1994).

The later history should not be used to excuse the actions of 1054, but it does establish scale. Humbert and Cerularius supplied a symbolic rupture. The Crusading centuries supplied repeated social and political experiences in which the other side could be encountered as an enemy, occupier, rival hierarchy, or heretic. By the time reunion was attempted at Lyon in 1274 and Ferrara-Florence in 1438-1439, the churches were negotiating across a much thicker wall of memory than had existed in the eleventh century.

14. Why the Schism Endured

If 1054 did not instantly divide the churches, why did it become the conventional dividing line? The answer lies in what came afterward. The constitutional disagreement over papal authority was not resolved. The Filioque remained in the Roman Creed. Latin and Byzantine disciplinary customs continued to diverge. Western papal reform accelerated under the successors of Leo IX and especially Gregory VII, strengthening claims that eastern patriarchs could not easily reconcile with their synodal

understanding of the church. Meanwhile, Byzantine ecclesial identity increasingly defined itself as the guardian of an unaltered conciliar and liturgical tradition.

The Crusades then transformed estrangement into trauma. The First Crusade began in 1095 within a context that included Byzantine appeals for military assistance, and cooperation was mixed with suspicion. Latin principalities and patriarchates in the eastern Mediterranean generated new jurisdictional competition. The Fourth Crusade's conquest and sack of Constantinople in 1204, followed by a Latin imperial regime and Latin patriarchate, became far more decisive in popular and institutional memory than the brief exchange of censures in 1054. It convinced many Byzantine Christians that Western claims to fraternity and universal ecclesial order could coexist with conquest of a Christian capital. The next chapter will treat that later medieval hardening in its proper context; here it is enough to recognize that 1204 helped turn a negotiable estrangement into a deeply inherited separation (Chadwick, 2003).

The schism also endured because both sides developed self-confirming genealogies. Western narratives could portray Rome as the divinely instituted center from which the Greeks had separated. Eastern narratives could portray the West as the innovating party that altered the Creed, expanded papal authority, and abandoned canonical tradition. Each story contained genuine evidence but could become selective when it ignored the other side's complexity. Historical genealogy is most useful precisely where it refuses those totalizing simplifications. Rome changed, Constantinople changed, political structures changed, and inherited differences acquired doctrinal meanings they had not always possessed.

Table 4. Causes and triggers of the East-West schism

Factor	Temporal role	Historical function
Roman primacy / jurisdiction	Long-term structural	Roman precedence was ancient; the disputed issue was whether that precedence entailed universal ordinary jurisdiction and final appellate authority.
Filioque	Long-term doctrinal and canonical	A genuine Trinitarian debate became inseparable from the unilateral modification of the ecumenical Creed.
Competing empires	Long-term political	Frankish/German and Byzantine claims to Roman Christian empire fostered rival identities and patronage systems.
Language and intellectual culture	Long-term cultural	Declining bilingualism made theological concepts and motives easier to misread.
Missionary jurisdiction	Medium-term institutional	Bulgaria, Moravia, and later Slavic lands exposed incompatible claims about who could organize new churches.
Clerical and liturgical customs	Long-term identity-forming	Marriage discipline, fasting, and ritual differences became universalized and polemized.
Norman southern Italy	Immediate political context	Disrupted a mixed Greek-Latin frontier and made rite, jurisdiction, and alliance urgent in 1053-1054.
Azyses controversy	Immediate trigger	Leo of Ohrid and Humbert turned Eucharistic bread into a test of legitimacy.
Humbert-Cerularius conflict	Immediate personal/institutional trigger	Inflexible diplomacy and expansive authority claims produced the dramatic censures of July 1054.

Table 5. Before, change, and result: how cumulative estrangement became durable division

Period	Before	Change	Result
After Nicaea II	Rome and Constantinople remain in communion; Byzantine icon settlement disputed in Frankish West.	Second iconoclasm, Carolingian criticism, papal-Frankish alliance.	Distinct political-theological worlds grow while formal communion survives.
Carolingian age	One inherited Roman-Christian ideal, though already regionally differentiated.	Charlemagne crowned emperor; Franks promote Filioque and judge Byzantine theology.	Two competing Christian Roman identities and sharper Western doctrinal self-confidence.
Photian crisis	Roman primacy and Constantinopolitan autonomy coexist without a settled universal constitution.	Disputed succession, papal intervention, Bulgaria, Filioque, rival councils.	Temporary rupture proves seriousness of constitutional disagreement, but 879-880 shows reconciliation remains possible.
Tenth-early eleventh centuries	Communion persists amid episodic estrangement.	Separate missionary spheres, decline of bilingualism, papal reform, Norman disruption.	Differences become institutional habits and identity markers.
1053-1054	Rome and Constantinople still negotiate and share fundamental Nicene-Chalcedonian faith.	Azyses polemic, Leo IX legation, Humbert-Cerularius confrontation, reciprocal censures.	A conventional milestone that later generations read as the Great Schism.
After 1054	No instantaneous universal break in daily Christian life.	Crusades, competing hierarchies, 1204 sack of Constantinople, failed reunions.	Separation hardens into durable Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox trajectories.

WHY THE RIFT WIDENED



Figure 3. The Great Schism as cumulative estrangement rather than a single-cause event.

Note. The six factors interacted over centuries. The relative weight of each varied by period; none alone explains the durable separation.

15. Major People, Institutions, and Texts

The road to schism was not driven by impersonal structures alone. Leo III's coronation of Charlemagne linked papal survival to a new Western imperial order. Nicholas I gave forceful expression to Roman appellate claims during the Photian controversy. Photius combined extraordinary learning with a sharp defense of Constantinopolitan autonomy and became the most important eastern critic of the Filioque before 1054. Cyril and Methodius embodied the possibility of cooperation across the emerging divide even while their mission unfolded inside geopolitical competition. Leo IX represented the new reforming papacy, while Humbert translated reform into a confrontational universalism at Constantinople. Michael Cerularius, for his part, used liturgical difference and patriarchal authority in ways that intensified rather than contained the crisis.

Institutions mattered just as much. The Roman see possessed an increasingly dense memory of Petrine texts, papal letters, decretals, and appeals. Constantinople possessed the canonical legacy of New Rome, the imperial court, patriarchal synod, and a Byzantine model of church order. Frankish and German courts supplied the political environment in which Western theology and papal reform grew. Monasteries carried liturgy, mission, translation, and polemics across frontiers. New Slavic churches were not passive descendants but agents that selected, adapted, and transmitted inherited forms. The genealogy of division is therefore institutional without being deterministic and personal without being reducible to personalities.

Table 6. Key figures on the road to the Great Schism

Figure	Historical role	Genealogical significance
Leo III (pope, 795-816)	Crowned Charlemagne in 800; defended Nicaea II; accepted Filioque theology but resisted inserting it into the ecumenical Creed.	Shows Rome could differ from both Byzantium and the Frankish court.
Charlemagne (r. 768-814)	Created a powerful Western Christian empire and sponsored Carolingian theological reform.	Made rival Roman imperial identity a durable East-West factor.
Nicholas I (pope, 858-867)	Asserted Roman authority in the Ignatius-Photius dispute and Bulgarian mission.	Strengthened papal jurisdictional claims.
Photius (patriarch, 858-867; 877-886)	Scholar, patriarch, critic of Filioque and Latin innovations; central to 867 rupture and 879-880 reconciliation.	Made pneumatology and authority central to East-West controversy.
Cyril and Methodius	Byzantine missionaries to Moravia; pioneers of Slavonic Christian literature; worked with Rome as well as Byzantium.	Demonstrate cooperation and competition in missionary genealogy.

Figure	Historical role	Genealogical significance
Leo IX (pope, 1049-1054)	Reforming pope; used synods and legates; sought strong Roman jurisdiction.	Connects 1054 with emerging reform papacy.
Humbert of Silva Candida	Leo IX's legate and polemicist; deposited bull on Hagia Sophia altar.	Personalized strong papal claims in confrontational form.
Michael Cerularius (patriarch, 1043-1058)	Defended Constantinopolitan customs and authority; backed anti-Latin criticism and synodal response.	Helped turn rite and jurisdiction into ecclesial boundary.

16. Biblical-Theological Assessment: Testing East and West by Sola Scriptura

16.1 The final authority of the apostolic Word

Historical antiquity can establish that a doctrine or practice is old; it cannot by itself establish that the doctrine is apostolic. The New Testament repeatedly locates the church under the authority of Christ and the apostolic gospel. The Bereans are praised for testing proclamation by Scripture ([Acts 17:11](#)). Paul warns that even an apostolic or angelic claim that contradicts the received gospel is to be rejected ([Galatians 1:8-9](#)). The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the cornerstone ([Ephesians 2:20](#)), not on the unlimited capacity of any later see, council, emperor, or patriarch to define truth independently of that foundation.

This principle judges both trajectories. Eastern appeal to ecumenical councils and inherited liturgy cannot become self-authenticating simply because a practice is ancient or widely received. Western appeal to Petrine succession cannot establish doctrines or jurisdictional powers that exceed what Scripture warrants. The question is not which institution possesses the oldest chain of claims, but which claims conform to the apostolic Word.

16.2 Peter, the keys, and the scope of Roman primacy

The strongest biblical case for Roman primacy begins with Peter's prominence. Jesus gives Peter the name associated with the rock and promises the keys of the kingdom ([Matthew 16:16-19](#)). Peter acts as a leading apostolic witness in Acts, preaches at Pentecost, opens the Gentile mission through Cornelius, and is repeatedly named first among the Twelve. Jesus commands him to strengthen his brothers ([Luke 22:31-32](#)) and to feed Christ's sheep ([John 21:15-17](#)). Any theology that minimizes Peter's real apostolic leadership fails to do justice to the New Testament.

The step from Petrine prominence to universal papal jurisdiction is more difficult to establish directly from Scripture. The authority to bind and loose is also given to the gathered disciples ([Matthew 18:18](#)). The Jerusalem Council records substantial participation by Peter, Paul, Barnabas, James, the apostles, elders, and the whole church rather than a unilateral Petrine decree ([Acts 15:6-29](#)). Paul can confront Peter publicly when Peter's conduct compromises gospel implications ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)). Local churches are instructed to appoint elders and overseers, and the New Testament does not identify one post-apostolic city bishop as possessing immediate jurisdiction over all congregations. Peter's unique apostolic role is therefore biblical; the claim that this role necessarily entails the later system of universal ordinary papal jurisdiction requires historical and theological premises beyond the explicit New Testament evidence.

This conclusion does not require an opposite absolutism in which universal coordination is unbiblical. Churches in the New Testament cooperate, send delegates, receive translocal apostolic instruction, collect funds together, and deliberate across congregations. The biblical challenge is to preserve genuine catholic unity and accountable leadership without converting service into lordship. Jesus' model is explicit: greatness among his followers is defined by service rather than domination ([Mark 10:42-45](#); [1 Peter 5:1-4](#)).

16.3 The Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son

The Filioque should be judged first by Scripture, not by the antiquity of either formula. [John 15:26](#) explicitly says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father. That wording deserves full weight. At the same time, the New Testament also binds the Spirit inseparably to the Son: the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ and of the Son ([Romans 8:9](#); [Galatians 4:6](#)), the risen Jesus breathes the Spirit ([John 20:22](#)), and the Spirit takes what belongs to Christ and glorifies him ([John 16:13-15](#)). A biblical pneumatology must therefore confess both the Father's unique relation to the Spirit and the intimate eternal and economic communion of Son and Spirit.

Scripture does not use the exact later formula 'proceeds from the Father and the Son' as the language of [John 15:26](#) uses 'from the Father.' Nor does Scripture provide a technical distinction between Latin processio and Greek ekporeusis. The safest theological conclusion is therefore to affirm no less than Scripture and to avoid making a later metaphysical formula an independent test of salvation. Western theology is right to resist any separation of Son and Spirit; Eastern theology is right to

insist that the explicit biblical language of procession from the Father cannot be casually displaced. Where later technical formulas are used, they must be explanatory servants of Scripture rather than additions with autonomous authority.

16.4 Can an ecumenical Creed be changed unilaterally?

The New Testament does not command the church to preserve one post-biblical creed in a permanently unalterable liturgical form. Creeds can be useful summaries of biblical truth. At the same time, truthfulness, mutual submission, and catholic accountability argue strongly against one regional church altering a confession that had functioned as a shared ecumenical standard and then expecting other churches to receive the change as obligatory. Paul's concern that churches maintain unity in the apostolic faith while avoiding factious self-assertion is evident in [1 Corinthians 1:10-13](#) and [Ephesians 4:1-6](#).

Accordingly, the Eastern procedural objection to the unilateral insertion of Filioque has substantial force even if one judges a carefully qualified Western theology to be compatible with biblical teaching. Leo III's early resistance to altering the creed illustrates that this concern was once intelligible in Rome itself. A theological explanation may be defensible while the method of universalizing it remains ecclesiologically unsound.

16.5 Clerical marriage, celibacy, and human tradition

On clerical marriage, the apostolic evidence is comparatively direct. Overseers and deacons are evaluated in relation to marriage and household governance ([1 Timothy 3:1-13](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)). Peter himself was married, as implied by references to his mother-in-law ([Mark 1:29-31](#)) and Paul's mention of apostles accompanied by believing wives ([1 Corinthians 9:5](#)). Paul values celibacy as a gift, not a universal command ([1 Corinthians 7:7](#)). A church may adopt disciplines for pastoral reasons, but Scripture does not authorize declaring marriage inherently incompatible with presbyteral ministry.

The Eastern practice of ordaining married men therefore preserves an evident apostolic possibility. The Western tradition of celibate priesthood can embody a serious biblical charism of undivided service when freely embraced, but it should not be elevated into a universal apostolic requirement that Scripture itself does not impose. This distinction between gift and law is one place where Sola Scriptura prevents regional discipline from becoming a measure of catholicity.

16.6 Bread, fasting, language, and the danger of making secondary customs salvific

The New Testament gives profound meaning to the Lord's Supper but does not make the leavened or unleavened character of the bread a universal boundary of church communion. The Passover setting of Jesus' final meal supports the historic Western appeal to unleavened bread, while the ordinary New Testament language of bread does not create a permanent ritual prescription on that point. What is commanded is remembrance of Christ, proclamation of his death, self-examination, and discernment of the body ([1 Corinthians 11:23-29](#)). To anathematize another church solely over bread type therefore exceeds the apostolic emphasis.

The same principle applies to fasting and liturgical language. Jesus assumes fasting but warns against performative religion ([Matthew 6:16-18](#)). Paul rejects judgment over disputable food and calendar practices when such matters become grounds of spiritual superiority ([Romans 14:1-13](#); [Colossians 2:16-23](#)). Pentecost itself anticipates proclamation across languages rather than one sacred Christian language ([Acts 2:5-11](#)). The history of the schism demonstrates how legitimate practices can become instruments of division when tradition is confused with command.

16.7 Unity, truth, and the sin of schism

Scripture does not permit unity to be purchased by indifference to truth. Paul commands separation from a false gospel and from destructive teaching ([Galatians 1:6-9](#); [Titus 3:10-11](#)). Yet the New Testament also treats unnecessary faction as a serious sin. Jesus prays that his followers may be one in a way that bears witness to the world ([John 17:20-23](#)). Paul rebukes Christians who construct partisan identities around revered leaders ([1 Corinthians 1:10-13](#); 3:4-7) and commands believers to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ([Ephesians 4:1-6](#)).

The road to 1054 contains doctrinal questions that mattered, especially Trinitarian confession and the nature of ecclesial authority. It also contains many moments in which pride, political rivalry, jurisdictional ambition, cultural contempt, and the absolutizing of local custom deepened division. A Sola Scriptura assessment therefore cannot simply declare one historical institution innocent and the other guilty. Where Rome exceeded the explicit biblical evidence for universal jurisdiction, the claim must be tested. Where Constantinople treated inherited custom, imperial status, or conciliar reception as self-validating, those claims must also be tested. Both are accountable to the same apostolic standard and to the same command to pursue truth in love ([Ephesians 4:15](#)).

SOLA SCRIPTURA FINDING

The central biblical issue behind the Great Schism is authority. Scripture supports apostolic leadership, accountable elders, interchurch cooperation, doctrinal discipline, and serious concern for unity. It does not plainly establish a post-apostolic universal monarch over all churches, nor does it authorize any regional tradition, patriarchate, emperor, or council to become an independent source of revelation. Councils and ancient sees are valuable witnesses only insofar as they faithfully preserve and explain the apostolic Word.

16.8 Acts 15 and the pattern of catholic decision-making

Acts 15 is particularly important because both centralized and conciliar models appeal to it. The Jerusalem meeting includes apostles and elders, testimony from Peter, missionary evidence from Paul and Barnabas, a scriptural judgment voiced by James, and a written decision sent to affected churches. The narrative therefore contains real authority and a genuinely translocal decision. It also resists reduction to one-man jurisdiction. Peter speaks decisively but does not simply issue a unilateral decree; James reasons from Scripture and proposes the judgment; the apostles and elders act with the whole church; and the letter presents the decision as one made in dependence on the Holy Spirit ([Acts 15:6-29](#)).

The passage does not provide a complete constitutional blueprint for post-apostolic patriarchates, ecumenical councils, or papal administration. The apostles possessed an unrepeatable eyewitness commission. Yet its theological pattern is instructive. Doctrinal conflict is addressed through public testimony, Scripture, Spirit-dependent discernment, accountable leaders, and a decision aimed at preserving both gospel truth and fellowship. Neither isolated individual supremacy nor autonomous regionalism captures the whole pattern.

For the East-West dispute, Acts 15 therefore supports the need for a visible means of resolving controversy without proving that a later bishop of Rome inherits the apostles' unique authority as universal monarch. It also challenges any model of conciliarity that treats consensus or antiquity as sufficient apart from Scripture. The council's legitimacy is inseparable from its fidelity to God's revealed saving work and the prophetic Word.

16.9 Distinguishing gospel fundamentals from church-dividing secondary questions

The New Testament distinguishes disputes that threaten the gospel from differences that believers may bear without breaking fellowship. Paul anathematizes a different gospel in [Galatians 1:6-9](#), rejects denials of bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, and treats idolatry and serious immorality as incompatible with Christian fidelity. Yet Romans 14 warns believers not to divide over food and days where God has received both parties. The principle does not make doctrine relative. It requires proportion: the gravity of division should correspond to the gravity of the truth at stake.

Applied to the medieval East-West conflicts, papal universal jurisdiction and the theology of the Spirit are serious because they concern church authority and the doctrine of God. They require rigorous biblical examination. Leavened versus unleavened bread, Saturday fasting, liturgical language, beard customs, and many disciplinary practices occupy a different category unless Scripture itself attaches salvific necessity to them. When Christians make such customs tests of catholicity, they risk repeating the error Paul opposed when secondary observances became grounds for judging servants whom God had received ([Romans 14:1-13](#); [Colossians 2:16-23](#)).

This distinction also corrects triumphalist readings of history. A tradition may defend a biblical truth in one controversy while acting unscripturally in another. Rome could rightly resist iconoclasm and still overreach in jurisdiction. Constantinople could rightly resist making local Western discipline universally binding and still participate in coercive imperial ecclesiology. The apostolic standard permits no communion to convert a partial historical strength into total theological self-vindication.

17. Contemporary Significance: What Remains Divided and What Has Been Clarified

The medieval rupture still structures global Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church developed a centralized communion with the bishop of Rome as pope and later defined universal papal jurisdiction and papal infallibility in forms the Eastern Orthodox churches do not receive. Eastern Orthodoxy developed as a communion of autocephalous churches sharing doctrine and sacramental life without one bishop exercising Roman-style universal ordinary jurisdiction. The historical trajectories can be traced through 1054, but their mature forms belong to later centuries and should not be projected backward without qualification.

Modern dialogue has nevertheless corrected several inherited caricatures. In 1965 Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I jointly declared that the sentences of excommunication associated with 1054 should be removed from the

memory and midst of the churches, while acknowledging that those censures had been directed at particular persons rather than at the churches as wholes. The declaration also recognized that later events, mutual distrust, and multiple factors produced the effective rupture (Paul VI & Athenagoras I, 1965). The act did not restore full communion, but it rejected the idea that the medieval anathemas should continue to function as a present barrier.

The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue has since addressed the relationship of primacy and synodality. Its Ravenna document in 2007 stated that Rome occupied the first place in the canonical taxis of the first millennium and that the bishop of Rome was first among the patriarchs, while acknowledging continuing disagreement over the interpretation and exercise of his prerogatives. The Chieti document in 2016 explored the same relationship in the first millennium, and the Alexandria document in 2023 extended the historical examination into the second millennium. These agreements do not erase doctrinal disagreement, but they show that the historical argument has moved beyond the simplistic alternatives of 'Rome had no primacy' and 'the first millennium already functioned exactly like the later papal monarchy' (Joint International Commission, 2007, 2016, 2023).

The Filioque has also been clarified. Contemporary Catholic teaching can state the Father's unique role as the source of Trinitarian life while interpreting the Latin formula in a manner intended not to posit two independent causes. Catholic-Orthodox dialogue has encouraged distinguishing the theology of the Spirit's relation to the Son from the historical question of the Creed's unilateral alteration. This does not make the controversy imaginary, but it identifies a larger area of possible theological convergence than medieval polemics allowed (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1995; North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, 2003).

As recently as November 2025, Pope Leo XIV and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I jointly reaffirmed commitment to the restoration of full communion and explicitly commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the 1965 removal of the exchange of excommunications. Their statement also rooted common witness in the Nicene faith while acknowledging that issues historically considered divisive remain under theological dialogue (Leo XIV & Bartholomew I, 2025). The contemporary significance of 1054 is therefore paradoxical: the schism remains institutionally real, but both communions now officially describe its history with greater nuance than many popular accounts on either side.

18. Genealogical Summary

Table 7. Genealogical profile of the East-West division

Category	Summary
Parent tradition	Chalcedonian imperial Christianity, with Rome and Constantinople still in communion after Nicaea II.
Approximate emergence	Gradual estrangement from the eighth to eleventh centuries; 1054 is the conventional milestone, not a single founding date.
Geographical centers	Rome and Latin Western Europe; Constantinople and the Byzantine/Slavic East; major contact zones included southern Italy, the Balkans, Moravia, and Bulgaria.
Principal actors	Leo III, Charlemagne, Nicholas I, Photius, Boris I, Cyril and Methodius, Leo IX, Humbert of Silva Candida, Michael Cerularius, Constantine IX.
Immediate trigger	Azyses and Latin-rite controversy, papal legation, failed diplomacy, bull of 16 July 1054, and Constantinopolitan synodal response of 24 July.
Deeper causes	Competing authority models, rival Christian empires, Filioque, missionary jurisdiction, declining bilingualism, canon-law divergence, liturgical identity, and political conflict in southern Italy.
Authority structure	Latin trajectory increasingly centered on papal primacy and jurisdiction; Byzantine trajectory centered on patriarchal-synodal order with Rome historically first but not accepted as universal ordinary monarch.
Principal doctrinal distinctives	Filioque and papal authority were the most enduring doctrinal/ecclesiological issues; Eucharistic bread, clerical discipline, fasting, and ritual custom became secondary identity markers.
Immediate branches	No clean instant branching in 1054. The Latin Western/Roman Catholic and Greek Eastern/Eastern Orthodox trajectories became progressively distinct.
Later descendants	Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox communion; later national and autocephalous Orthodox churches developed within the eastern trajectory.
Present-day presence	Both are global Christian communions. Full sacramental communion remains absent, while formal theological dialogue and high-level ecumenical relations continue.
Major biblical questions	Nature of Petrine leadership; limits of church authority; Father-Son-Spirit relations; authority to formulate creeds; place of tradition; legitimacy of mandated celibacy; treatment of secondary liturgical customs; biblical meaning of unity and schism.

19. Conclusion and Transition: From Estrangement to the Medieval Latin System

Between 787 and 1054, Rome and Constantinople traveled from a strained Chalcedonian communion toward a rupture that later generations would call the Great Schism. The journey was neither simple nor inevitable. Nicaea II was followed by renewed Byzantine iconoclasm and final restoration in 843. The papacy shifted politically toward the Franks, while Constantinople remained embedded in the eastern Roman imperial world. Charlemagne's coronation created rival Christian claims to Roman empire. The Filioque moved from a Western theological formula into the text of the Creed, turning pneumatology into a question of conciliar authority. Nicholas I and Photius tested incompatible understandings of jurisdiction in the 860s, yet communion was restored. Slavic missions expanded Christian civilization and created new Latin and Byzantine spheres without eliminating local agency. Liturgical and disciplinary diversity became increasingly polemical. Finally, reforming papal universalism, Byzantine resistance, Norman disruption in southern Italy, and the azymes controversy converged in the confrontational events of July 1054.

The decisive historical conclusion is therefore negative as well as positive. The Great Schism was not caused by one word, one pope, one patriarch, one emperor, one culture, or one day. It was the cumulative result of unresolved disagreements about authority and doctrine interacting with political rivalry and hardened cultural difference. Nor did 1054 immediately complete the separation. Its symbolic force grew because later events, above all the Crusades and the sack of Constantinople in 1204, transformed institutional estrangement into durable historical memory.

The biblical conclusion is equally demanding. Peter's leadership, the church's need for order, the value of doctrinal confession, and the responsibility to guard truth are all scriptural. Yet no later institution is exempt from the apostolic test. Rome's claims to universal jurisdiction, Constantinople's claims for conciliar and imperial tradition, the Filioque, clerical discipline, and liturgical customs must all remain subordinate to the Word of God. Christian unity is not achieved by suppressing truth, but neither is truth served by turning regional custom, political privilege, or institutional ambition into a cause of unnecessary schism.

The next stage of the genealogy moves into the Latin West after 1054. There the papal reform movement would intensify, the Investiture Controversy would sharpen claims of papal supremacy, canon law and scholastic theology would mature, the sacramental system would become more formally defined, crusading would alter relations with both Muslims and eastern Christians, and internal movements for reform would grow. The medieval Roman Catholic system that confronted Luther in the sixteenth century did not appear fully formed in 1054. It was built over the next five centuries. Understanding that construction is necessary before the Reformation can be understood fairly.

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