

Name _____



Christianity

By Sharon Fabian

When you look at a picture of a medieval town, what do you see at the town's center? Often, you will see a Christian cathedral. With its tall spires reaching toward heaven, the cathedral dominated the landscape in many small towns of the Middle Ages. This is not a surprise, since Christianity was the dominant religion in Europe during that time.

Christianity was not the only religion in Europe in the Middle Ages. There were Jews, Muslims, and pagans in Europe too, but as the Middle Ages progressed, Christianity established itself as the religion of Europe's Middle Ages.

How did that happen? Christianity had already been growing for hundreds of years in the Roman Empire, and when the Roman Empire collapsed, Christianity continued. Then, during the Middle Ages, Christian leaders began to gain power again. As new countries were formed, Christian leaders were often in charge. In the Middle Ages, "Church" and "State" were not kept separate as they are in many places now.

The Pope, the leader of the Catholic Church, became the most powerful leader in Europe. Popes sometimes even crowned kings and queens. The great leader, Charlemagne, was crowned emperor by the Pope.

As the Catholic Church was gaining in size and power, it was also continuing to develop its religious beliefs. In some cases, groups of Christians in different places developed different beliefs. That is why, in 1054, the Catholic Church split into two parts -- the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Both of these branches have continued to have their own beliefs and their own leaders to the present day. The Eastern Orthodox Church was dominant only in far eastern Europe.



Roman Catholics of the Middle Ages shared the belief that there was one God, and that he created the universe. They believed that God sent his son, Jesus, to Earth to save mankind. They believed that God wanted his people to meet for worship. They believed that it was their religious duty to convert others to Christianity.

Roman Catholics believed in the Bible - both the Old Testament, which dated back to the time before Jesus was born, and the New Testament, which contained Jesus' teachings as told by his apostles.

Their beliefs led to several developments, which have become part of the history of the Middle Ages. One was the building of magnificent cathedrals for worship. Another was the Crusades, military campaigns to take back Palestine, the Christian "Holy Land," from the Muslims. A third development was the creation of religious orders of monks and nuns who made it their career to do the work of the Church.

The Roman Catholic Church continued to dominate religious life in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, but as the Middle Ages declined, so did the power of the Church. Some people felt that it was time for a change and began to call for reform. In the years to come, the Christian Church would be divided yet again.

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Questions

- _____ 1. The main religion in Europe during the Middle Ages was the _____ religion.
 - A. Muslim
 - B. pagan
 - C. Christian or Catholic
 - D. Jewish
- _____ 2. During the Middle Ages, a church leader would never have been chosen as the leader of a country.
 - A. false
 - B. true

