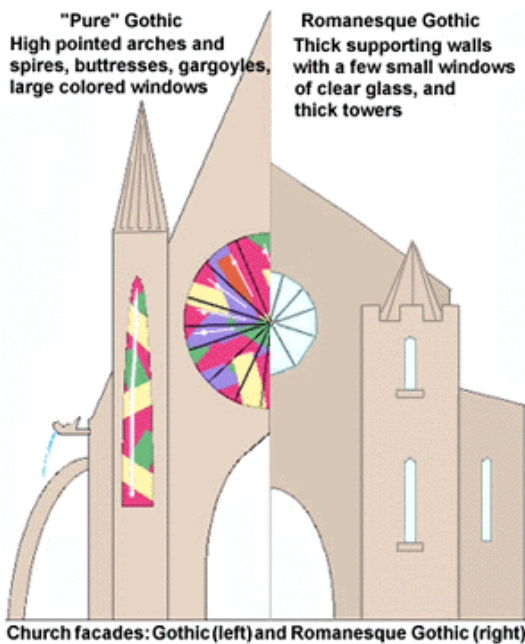


During the Postclassical Era, Christianity provided a measure of cultural commonality for the diverse societies of east and west Europe. By 1300 CE, almost all of these societies followed some form of Christianity, but was deeply divided socially and politically. A form of Christianity called Eastern Orthodoxy was practiced in the eastern portion of Europe, known as the Byzantine Empire, and a form known as Roman Catholicism in Western Europe. Although both forms, or denominations, of Christianity have much in common, the competition and rivalry between the two empires prevented a widespread Christian community from developing.

Roman Catholicism

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the **Roman Catholic Church** remained a part of Western Europe's structure. These religious people believed that the Roman Catholic Church represented God and held the power to send a person to Heaven or Hell. Most Western Europeans felt united by their common faith and therefore organized themselves into regional kingdoms connected by Catholicism. Roman Catholics shared many features with the E. Orthodox Church such as the belief in the teachings of Jesus, the Bible, the sacraments, etc., but they also differed in many ways. Some of these differences were the Church hierarchy, the role the government played in the Church, and other defining

characteristics: Roman Catholic priests shaved their beards, were required to remain celibate, and used Latin as the official Church language. Church architecture also shifted during the Middle Ages from a Romanesque style to the **Gothic** style. Romanesque architecture had thick walls, rounded arches, and very few to no windows. Gothic architecture, on the other hand, was characterized by pointed arches, gargoyles, flying buttresses and large stained glass windows. The cathedrals were built larger to represent the strength and power of the Church while at the same time built taller to literally bring ordinary people closer to God. The stained glass windows let in more light, a symbol of God, while also depicting stories and scenes from the Bible. The gargoyles acted as water spouts when it rained and were supposed to frighten away evil spirits from the cathedral.

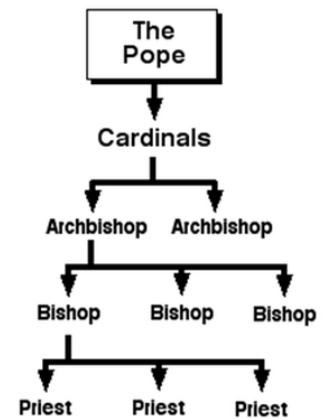


Spread of Roman Catholicism

Christianity is a **proselytizing** religion and this is the practice of trying to persuade someone to join your religion or convert them from one religion to another. Most proselytizing religions use **missionaries** in order to teach and educate others while preaching their religion at the same time. Numerous missionaries traveled all across Europe and attempted to convert the pagan peoples that aided in the cultural unification of Europe. The Germanic tribes also converted to Christianity and spread the religion in areas of northern Europe when they conquered new territories. Missionaries and church officials also were generally the only people who could read and write so education and schooling were used to teach children throughout Western Europe how to read and write as well as learn the teachings of the Catholic faith.

Who's Who in the Church

The Catholic Church was led by the **Pope** in Rome. The Pope was regarded as the successor of St. Peter, leader of the Apostles, after the death of Jesus, and claimed to be the sole and final authority for all Christians. The Church also had the right to appoint its own officials and the Pope governed the Church with the help of cardinals, bishops, and other church officials. Another church leader, **St. Thomas Aquinas** wrote a book that provided a summary of Christian beliefs. He compared the teachings of Aristotle with Christian teachings to try and find a relationship between faith and reason. He also believed in the existence of "natural law". These laws were independent of any laws passed by government and told Roman Catholics to "do good and to avoid evil".



Powers of the Church & Government Influence

The Roman Catholic Church was responsible for carrying out the **sacraments** (baptism, marriage, Communion, etc.) as well as holding regular church services. People in Western Europe were told for many years that the only way they could get into Heaven was through the Catholic Church. Thus, the Church had high influence in the social sphere of Western Europe. Later, the Church also had its own court system called the **Inquisition** that would try and convict people of heresy, an opinion that contradicts established religious teachings. If someone was convicted of heresy they could be sentenced to death or **excommunicated** from the Church. If a person was excommunicated they were no longer allowed to attend church services or receive any church sacraments - this was basically a ticket to Hell because Roman Catholics believed the only way to Heaven was through the Church and the sacraments. Throughout history, kings were even excommunicated and Popes began to gain the power to crown and dethrone emperors.

Many nobles in feudal societies left land to the Church when they died hoping to gain entry into Heaven. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church controlled enormous amounts of land in Western Europe called **Papal States**. This allowed the Church to gain enormous amounts of wealth not to mention that the Church did not have to pay taxes while Catholics paid 10% of what they earned in a year to the Church – this was called a **tithe**.

The Church and government officials also reinforced each other's power. Rulers provided protection and strong encouragement for the faith while the Church offered religious legitimacy for the powerful and prosperous.

