

Religion and Politics in the Greek Successor States after the Fourth Crusade (1204)

Mitchell T. Anthony

Before the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the Byzantine Empire had a strong relationship and was greatly influenced by the Patriarch of Constantinople. This relationship was beneficial to the Empire, as it gave the government a religious mandate to rule over the people, and provided the Emperor with legitimacy. Eastern Orthodoxy benefitted from this relationship, as the Byzantine Empire was the defender of the faith, and offered a vehicle in which to spread the religion. After the Fourth Crusade, the Byzantine Empire failed to protect the seat of the Patriarch and thus failed to protect the faith. As a result of this, there was a sixty year period in which the Eastern Orthodox faith was unstable, and its influence on politics was weakened in the area until the final fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. I argue that the relationship between church and state before the Fourth Crusade was somewhat equal, with the Patriarch actually having more power than the Byzantine Emperor, but after the siege of Constantinople in 1204, and the formation of the Latin Empire and Greek Successor States (Empire of Nicaea, Empire of Trebizond, and Despotate of Epirus), the relationship makes a drastic change and ends up in favor of the Emperor gaining more power over the Patriarch and the Eastern Orthodox Church.