

they are flexible in their interpretations of these words. Reconstructionist Jews do not believe in a personal God, for example, and neither do some Reform Jews, including rabbis. Conservative Judaism requires belief in God, but leaves the description of “God” quite open. Similarly, the Messiah is understood by many Jews to be a better time in the future, rather than a liberating king. And many do not believe literally in an apocalyptic World to Come, or even in a personal life after death.

Yet the core teaching of Judaism from ancient times to the present remains that the people of Israel were chosen by God to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God established a covenant with Abraham and renewed it with Moses at Sinai, and the “people of Israel” – Jews – are bound by it today. As God’s People, they have a special responsibility, and by carrying out this responsibility they make their lives holy and set an example for the rest of the world to follow.

## Unit II Christianity

### The History and Teachings of Christianity

#### Origins

What we now call Christianity was started by Jesus of Nazareth in the first century. From birth to death, he was a Jew and presented himself as a Jewish reformer. He did not call himself “Christ” – this is a title used later by his followers. “Christ” is the English form of *Christos*, the Greek translation of “messiah,” meaning “one who is anointed (as king).” As we saw, the idea that a messiah would come to liberate Jews from foreign oppressors became important in the centuries before Jesus’ birth. The Messiah, it was said, would be a Jewish king descended from King David.

What we know about Jesus’ life comes mostly from what was written about him, decades after his death, in the **gospels**, from the Old English word for “good news.” Biblical scholars (see Chapter 3) disagree about the exact dating of the gospels but generally agree that they were written at least forty years after the events they describe. Biblical scholars also generally agree that none of the Gospels was written by people who knew Jesus personally, even though two of the four gospels are attributed to the friends of Jesus whose names they bear: Matthew and John. Still, working with scripture and other historical documents, scholars believe they can discern some facts about Jesus’ life and teachings.

Jesus grew up in the lower class in Nazareth, a town in Galilee in the northern part of Palestine (the name the Romans had given to the parts of the land of Canaan between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, now known as the state of Israel and the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza). When he was about thirty, Jesus began preaching about “the kingdom of God,” “kingdom” here being a translation of the Greek word for “reign” or “rule.” (Although Palestine was ruled by Rome at the time, the language of learning was still Greek. The gospels were therefore written in Greek.) The Kingdom or Reign of God would be a world in which people lived the way God has told them to live.



**FIGURE 6.8** Statue of Jesus Christ the Redeemer above Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Mark Schwettmann/Shutterstock Images.

Like many preachers at the time, Jesus spoke of an “apocalypse,” a catastrophic ending to the world as we know it. He said that when this happens, God will judge everyone and then reward those who have followed his will, and punish those who have not. Many of Jesus’ followers thought that he was the Messiah, but he did not appear to be a kingly figure, much less a political liberator, as most people expected the Messiah to be. Jesus did not tell his followers to overthrow Roman rule, and even told them to pay their taxes to the Romans. His preaching was not about politics, but about morality. Nor did he speak as a theologian discussing doctrine or as a rabbi discussing details of the law. He preached in simple stories – called **parables** – about how people should live. When he said that people should love their neighbors, for example, and someone asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus did not define “neighbor,” but showed what he meant by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).





## Samaritans Today

There are still Samaritans today. Many live near Mount Gerizim – known as Jabal Tur, in Arabic, located in the West Bank city of Nablus – which is biblical Shechem. Samaritans believe Mount Gerizim is where Abraham almost sacrificed his son. They therefore hold it sacred.

In that story a Jewish traveler is beaten by bandits and left for dead at the roadside. Two religious authorities pass by, one after the other, but neither stops to help the victim. Then a Samaritan comes by, nurses the man's wounds, takes him to an inn and instructs the innkeeper to take care of the man until he is well, and pays the man's bill.

The Samaritans – “people of Samaria” – claimed that they were descended from the tribes of Israel (see above). However, this claim was rejected by the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity, and the two communities had been bitter enemies ever since. So Jesus’ using a Samaritan as an example of highly moral behavior would have seemed strange to his Jewish audiences, who were used to dealing with morality exclusively within their own community. There have been numerous religious interpretations of the parable over the centuries, but scholars see in its emphasis on an inclusive moral community a major step in the development of what would become Christianity as distinct from Judaism.

Another significant distinction between the two traditions can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Believed by scholars to be a summary of major themes in Jesus’ overall teaching, it begins with eight “Beatitudes,” statements about how people are “blessed” when they do God’s will even though they suffer for it. He praises those who are gentle, who forgive others, and who are willing to be persecuted for the sake of justice. By following the will of God they embody the Kingdom of God.

While for many people at the time, being a good Jew was carefully following the 613 mitzvot, Jesus emphasizes what is called the “Great Commandment” from Leviticus 19:18: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself.” He skips hundreds of mitzvot, including those about purity, diet, and observing the Sabbath. Rejecting the biblical law of retaliation (“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” – Exodus 21:23–25; Leviticus 24:19–21), Jesus says, “Do not resist an evildoer.” While the Hebrew Bible sanctioned retaliation (or vengeance), Jesus stresses love. He says, “You have heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43–44) This emphasis will comprise another distinction between the Judaic and Christian traditions.

As we shall see, some aspects of these teachings will be reinterpreted by later Christians as circumstances change, but certain aspects of Jesus’ teaching remain central to the Christian tradition throughout history, including his focus on love, as well as doing the will of God. As he put it when he gave an example of how to pray,



## The Beatitudes, from the Sermon on the Mount

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3–10 (NRSV)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed [holy, revered] be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our offenses, as we also have forgiven those who offend us. And do not lead us into temptation, but rescue us from evil. (Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4)

The important things in life, Jesus continues, are not material possessions, which can wear out or be lost. What is important is striving to carry out God's will. Like a good father, God knows that you need such things as food and clothing, and he will provide them if you do his will.

The Gospels present more than just what Jesus taught. They also describe what he did, such as miraculously healing blind and paralyzed people, and bringing dead people back to life. The writers of the Gospels said that they were including these miracles to show that Jesus spoke and acted with authority from God, and many people were attracted to his teachings as a result.

As Jesus attracted more and more followers, some of whom called him the Messiah and King of the Jews, the Roman rulers of Palestine became suspicious. They feared that he would lead a revolution. So Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea (the province where Jesus lived), tried Jesus and sentenced him to death by crucifixion. The Gospels say that three days after Jesus died he came back to life (was "resurrected"), spent 40 days among his followers, and then ascended ("went up") into heaven. His followers expected him to return soon – as Messiah. However, when this did not happen, different understandings of who Jesus was evolved, and an entire movement developed around his teachings.

## The Development of Christian Doctrine

The most influential person after Jesus in the new movement was Paul of Tarsus ("last names" or surnames are a modern invention; in the olden days people were often identified by where they lived – such as Tarsus, in what is now Turkey), who lived from about 3 to

about 66 CE. He was a Pharisee who had adapted to the Greco-Roman world. Paul was the first to write anything that is now in the New Testament – his Letters or **Epistles**, which he used to spread the new movement beyond Palestine to Greece and Rome. The first Christians thought of themselves as Jews, and so required that non-Jewish men joining their group be circumcised. However, Paul says that this is a new movement and should include not only Jews but anyone else who is willing to follow Jesus' teachings. As more and more non-Jews joined, eventually Christians came to think of themselves as a separate tradition.

Paul never met Jesus and says very little about the details of Jesus' life. His epistles mention some aspects of Jesus' moral teaching. In his first letter to his followers in Corinth, for example, he writes about love so beautifully that it is among his most quoted passages:

If I speak in tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always preserves.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.  
(I Corinthians 13:1–13)

Even U.S. President Barack Obama quoted from this passage in his inaugural speech. However, Paul's primary emphasis is on the cosmic significance of Jesus' life and death. He describes Jesus as redeeming human beings – that is, saving them – from their natural sinfulness, especially through his death and resurrection.

Over the first three centuries of the common era, as Christianity spread through much of the Middle East, Northeast Africa, and southern Europe, a number of opinions developed about the identity of Jesus and the meaning of his mission. It was common to refer to Jesus as "Son of God." "Son of God" is a standard phrase in the Hebrew Bible, meaning someone who follows God's will, as when Jesus tells his followers to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father in heaven." (Matthew 5:44–45) Some Christian groups believed that Jesus was literally the "Son of God," and that he had no beginning in time as normal sons have. He was the Eternal Son of God.



## Baptism

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark say that, at the beginning of his public life, Jesus was baptized by his cousin John in the River Jordan. As in many traditions, in Judaism the ritual of being immersed in water – **mikvah** – is a symbol of purification. It is required after coming into contact with substances that are considered impure. As we saw in Chapter 4, these typically include blood and other bodily fluids, as well as corpses. When a non-Jew wants to become a Jew, s/he must undergo this symbolic purification after living a life not protected from impurity by the following of Judaic law. It thus symbolizes a monumental change in status – for the better. Jesus' baptism became a symbol of a similar change in status; baptism indicates acceptance of Jesus' teachings. In Matthew 28:19, he commissioned his apostles to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."



**FIGURE 6.9** Woman baptized in the Jordan River. Eddie Gerald/Alamy.

This teaching was based on the Gospel of John, which starts: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

There were other ideas about Jesus, as well. Some early Christian groups believed that Jesus was divine, but that he was not eternal because he had been created. Some said that he was the adopted son of God – created as a man but then made divine by God. These and many other ideas about Jesus circulated among early Christians in over fifty documents.





**FIGURE 6.10** *In hoc signo vinces.*

They included the four gospels most Christians are familiar with (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), as well as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Ebionites, the Gospel of the Nazareans, and the Gospel According to the Hebrews. Early Christians also had the letters of Paul and James (another of Jesus' followers), which are now in the canonical (official) Bible. However, there were letters of other early Christian preachers, as well, such as Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas, and Polycarp. Known as the Apostolic Fathers, they did not know Jesus but they did know the original twelve **apostles** – Jesus' closest students and messengers – and so their 1st- and 2nd-century writings are considered authoritative. As well, besides the now canonical Apocalypse of John, early Christians had the Apocalypse of Jesus' great friend Peter. With input from so many diverse sources, it is not surprising that early Christian thought reflected multiple viewpoints. There was, in these early centuries, no orthodoxy in Christian thought.

### The Institutionalization and Politicization of Christianity

This lack of orthodoxy would change with the development of Christianity as a political force. During the first three centuries of Christianity, several Roman rulers had ordered the persecution of Christians. In 64 the emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the fire that burned much of Rome, and he started killing Christians in the Roman Coliseum in horrible ways for public entertainment. He even devised a tunic impregnated with a flammable liquid, so that the Christian **martyr** (literally, a “witness” but more generally, someone who maintains commitment to a cause even in the face of death) would slowly burn to death to the delight of the crowd. The last major persecutions were in the early fourth century, with thousands of Christians killed.

However, in 312, the Emperor Constantine, whose mother was Christian, became interested in the movement. Constantine led a life full of warfare. He fought with other generals for leadership of the Roman Empire, and led battles against European tribes that did not want to be part of that empire. According to one story, before a major battle he had a vision of the Greek letters *chi* and *rho*, the first two letters of the Greek word for “Christ,” superimposed on one another. Under this were the words *In hoc signo vinces* – “in this sign you will conquer.”

Taking this vision as a divine message, Constantine had his troops paint these symbols on their shields, and they won the battle. After this he signed an edict that allowed Christians to practice their religion openly, instead of in hiding as they had done during the persecutions.

The Christian population of the Roman empire was, of course, extremely grateful to Constantine. And their allegiance to Constantine no doubt strengthened his political



## The Expanded Nicene Creed

We believe (I believe) in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. (God of God) light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven. And was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and was made man; was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried; and the third day rose again according to the Scriptures. And ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, and shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose Kingdom there shall be no end. And (I believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who together with the Father and the Son is to be adored and glorified, who spoke by the Prophets. And one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We confess (I confess) one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for (I look for) the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

authority *vis à vis* rival claimants to power in Rome. However, Constantine found the disagreements among the various Christians in the empire to be troublesome. In 325, therefore, he organized a conference of bishops in Nicea (in today's Turkey), in order to get agreement among Christian authorities.

At the time, various Christian communities around the Mediterranean were led by **presbyters**, a Greek term that means “elder” and is often translated as “bishop.” One of them, Arius of Alexandria (Egypt), said that Jesus had been created by God. However, at the Council of Nicea, that idea was voted down in favor of the view that Jesus, like God the Father, was uncreated. By the end of the conference, a majority of bishops had agreed on an official statement saying that Jesus was uncreated and was the same substance as the Father. The document also referred to the “Holy Spirit” – terminology found in Talmudic literature referring to God or to God’s communication to prophets. The official statement became known as the **Nicene Creed**. At a later council in Constantinople in 381, it was expanded into the familiar creed that is now accepted by almost all sects of Christians.

Once this creed was official, Arius and his followers were branded heretics. “Arian” Christianity and other forms of Christianity continued, mainly in the Middle East, as minorities outside the official control of Rome.

At around the same time, Christian leaders rejected more than half of the gospels and epistles used by the various Christian communities. By the mid-300s they had determined an official list, a canon, of the 27 books that are now called the **New Testament**.





## Christianity and Faith

Being a Jew means living in accordance with the laws of God. One becomes a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ("son" or "daughter" of the law or "commandments"). Similarly, being a Muslim means living in accordance with Islamic law. In the case of Christianity, the identifying factor is having correct beliefs. This is, in fact, the core meaning of "orthodoxy," from the Greek words for "straight" and "teaching." The rite of passage into adulthood in Christianity is Confirmation – a ceremony in which one affirms one's "faith" or "belief in" the teachings of the Church. This is why Christianity is often called a "faith." While specific beliefs are central to both Jewish and Muslim identity, it is less common to refer to either Judaism or Islam as faiths.

Christianity, its basic literature and doctrines newly established, became the state religion of the Roman empire in 380. That meant that it was central to the government's legitimacy; its leaders approved of the government and acceptance of its official teachings became the measure of full membership in the Roman state. Those who did not accept official Christian teaching were not only excluded from the rights of citizenship; because they did not accept the state ideology, they were considered politically suspect – possibly traitors. This politicization of Christianity marked the beginning of anti-Jewish sentiment discussed above.

Two more councils of the Christian Church were held, to further define correct understandings of Christian doctrine, in 431, and 451. They declared that Jesus is fully God and fully human, one person with a divine nature and a human nature, and that he always was and always will be God. The Holy Spirit was declared to be equal to the Father and the Son. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit make up the **Trinity**, which comes from the Greek and Latin root *tri-*, meaning three. Yet the Trinity does not compromise the monotheism of Christianity. Christians believe in only one God – which has three "persons."

From these early councils to today, the issue of orthodoxy versus heresy has been important in most Christian groups. When members within a group had major differences in their beliefs, they usually split into different sects or churches. This splitting has led to today's 34,000 Christian sects.

### Eastern and Western Christians

Once Christianity was the state religion of the Roman Empire, it had support from the government and its leaders had considerable political influence. In the 3rd century, the bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch in Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, and Rome were called patriarchs. In the 4th century, when Constantine moved the imperial capital to Byzantium, in today's Turkey, its bishop became the fifth patriarch. Starting in the 3rd century, the bishops of Rome argued that they were more than local patriarchs, since they had inherited their authority from Rome's first bishop, Peter, and Jesus had chosen Peter to lead his new church. So, they said, the Bishop of Rome was a super-bishop, the leader of all



**MAP 6.2** Map of the Roman Empire – East and West.

Christians. The other four patriarchs disagreed, especially the patriarch of Byzantium, which Constantine had renamed after himself – Constantinople, “City of Constantine.” Eventually, the bishop of Rome would establish himself as the patriarch of the **Roman Catholic Church** and call himself the pope, from *papa* for father. He ruled over the Western or Latin Church with its headquarters in Rome. The bishop of Byzantium (Constantinople) would be the patriarch of the Byzantine Church, now called the Orthodox or Eastern Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church is a group of self-governing regional churches, including Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Russian. Various smaller churches, such as the Coptic Church in Egypt, have their own patriarchs.

**THE WESTERN/ROMAN CHURCH** Early on, the Roman Church started calling itself Catholic, that is, universal. Being in the western center of the Roman Empire gave the Bishop of Rome prestige and power. In the 400s the Roman Empire in Europe was disintegrating under the impact of invasions by Germanic tribes. As a result, the bishop of Rome became even more powerful, as he assumed some of the roles that kings and princes had had in the Empire. Through the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was a central institution in Europe, and church law, developed from Roman Law, provided social stability. The officials of the church served as local clerks of the empire. In fact, the term “clerk” comes from the same root as “clergy,” the religious hierarchy.

In matters of doctrine, the western Roman churches and the eastern Byzantine churches agreed on most issues, but they emphasized different things. Starting with Augustine of

Hippo (now in Algeria; d. 430), Western churches emphasized the “fallenness” of the human race after Adam and Eve’s disobedience – the idea that human beings are by nature prone to serious error (are “sinful”) and cannot overcome this condition on their own. They need to be rescued (“saved”); they have to let God do for them what they cannot do for themselves. This rescue (or “salvation”) was accomplished by Jesus’ death on the cross. It is sacrificial and salvific (it saves them). As we shall see, this concern with sinfulness and guilt came to dominate medieval European Christianity and then Protestant thinkers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Psychologists of religion often see Augustine’s concern with sinfulness as linked to his negative views about sex. As a teenager, he was undisciplined and out of control. The woman he lived with had a baby when he was 14. During his twenties, in an effort to get control of himself, he began to follow the teachings of Mani (d. 276), a religious figure who taught that the human soul is good and made of light, while the body is bad and made of dark earth. Adding to Augustine’s negative view of the human body was his reading of philosophers influenced by Plato who saw the soul as striving for good and the body pulling us toward evil. When Augustine became a Christian and then a bishop in his thirties, he felt guilty for his sinful early years and came to view sex itself as evil. It is through sexual intercourse, he said, that the Original Sin of Adam and Eve is passed on to each succeeding generation. According to Augustine, even within marriage, sex engaged in for pleasure is sinful; sex is only acceptable as fulfilling the task of continuing the human race. What is more, since women were the source of all his sexual temptations, Augustine thought of them as morally dangerous. So the morally superior choice for a Christian man would be to avoid sex, even in marriage; even better is to live a celibate life as a priest or monk.

Augustine’s thinking influenced Christian theology in other ways, as well. One was his rationalism, his confidence in the ability of the human mind to figure things out. As a Christian, he saw the need for faith, of course, but reason can work with faith, he said. His motto was “Faith seeking understanding.” Augustine’s books combined references to the Bible with quotations from philosophers and his own philosophical reflections, in a way that showed confidence in the power of reason to clarify matters of faith and to establish truths of its own. In the Middle Ages Christian thinkers inherited this confidence in reason. Christians believe that God exists, for example, but theologians such as Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) worked out arguments to prove the existence of God. With these arguments, they said, we can go beyond merely believing that God exists to knowing that he does. They also thought carefully about the nature of God, examining questions about God’s knowledge, power, and goodness, and his relationship to the human race. Starting in the 11th century, the Catholic Church established universities in Western Europe, and in them Theology (the study of the existence and attributes of God) was called the “Queen of the Sciences.”

Another major development in the Christian Middle Ages was devotion to saints – individuals recognized for their extraordinary goodness. In early centuries Christians remembered those who had stood out for their piety, such as martyrs who had died for their faith. Relics of saints, such as their bones, were treasured, and each altar had at least one relic built into it. Eventually, the church worked out an official list of saints and a procedure for adding new ones. One requirement was that miracles be attributed to the person, such



## Popular Religion, Folk Religion, Lived Religion

Popular religious practices are sometimes known as **folk religion** – beliefs and practices of people that are not strictly part of their religion but are not in conflict with it either. Often passed down through local communities and so varying from region to region, folk beliefs and practices generally reflect practical concerns such as health and prosperity. For example, people may carry an image of a particular saint believed to be a specialist in safe travels, or recite a prayer to a personal angel to keep them safe during sleep.

Many scholars of religion view such beliefs and practices as part of **lived religion**. The study of lived religion de-emphasizes organized religion in favor of less formal expressions of people's spiritual concerns. One of the major proponents of the study of lived religion was Wilfred Cantwell Smith (d. 2000). He taught that religion should not be thought of as an abstract set of beliefs and practices but as the lived experience of individuals in their relationship to the transcendent.

Some scholars see the category "folk religion" as derogatory, as if such practices are somehow of a lesser order than "official" or orthodox religion. As well, some see it as a reflection of the inadequacy of the term "religion" in the first place. They argue that "religion" is a category based on a Christian paradigm that requires certain components and excludes others – some of which may well be as important to the people who practice them as, for example, sacraments are to Christians. We shall return to this discussion in Chapter 10.

as someone's being cured of a disease or infirmity after praying to the dead person to intercede with God for them. People prayed to specific saints for specific things, and even visited ("made pilgrimages to") places associated with their lives and therefore considered holy (their "shrines") to ask for favors. St. Cecilia, for example, had been a talented musician and so was prayed to by musicians. St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, was a carpenter and so became known as the "patron saint" of carpenters. It is in this context that we see aspects of what scholars call **popular religion** – religious practices that are not necessarily grounded in official doctrine but enjoy widespread popularity – develop in Christianity. In many countries today, for example, Joseph is also the patron of house hunting and selling. People who want to sell their home may bury a statue of Joseph in their yard. Similarly, St. Jude is considered the patron saint of "lost causes" and he requests that his favors be acknowledged publicly. So the "Personal" sections of newspapers often have notices that say, "Thanks to St. Jude for favors received." The calendar of the Catholic church still celebrates hundreds of saints' feast days.

The mother of Jesus, Mary, is also highly important in Christianity. The church authorities said that Jesus was God, and Mary was his mother, so the Council of Ephesus in



451 declared her to be the Mother of God. She is a figure of enormous popular devotion, particularly in Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity.

**THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES** As the Roman Catholic Church was growing in Western Europe through the Middle Ages, the traditions now known as **Orthodox** developed in Greece, the Middle East, Africa, and Russia. In Greece, the Byzantine Church flourished from the 4th century to 1453, when the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople, changed its name to Istanbul, and made it the capital of their Islamic empire. Since Islamic law protected religious freedom, Christianity continued to thrive. In 988 the leaders of Russia adopted a Byzantine form of Christianity.

Though there were tensions between these Eastern churches and the pope in Rome over theological and political issues, they were all considered to be in the same tradition until 1054, when disagreements between the Patriarch of Constantinople and an emissary of the pope led them to excommunicate (declare someone to be no longer a member of the community) each other. From this **Great Schism** on, the Orthodox churches have considered themselves separate from the Roman Catholic Church. During the Crusades, Western Catholics captured and looted Constantinople, an outrage that has not been forgotten by Eastern Christians.

Whereas the Western Christians remained unified under the leadership of the pope in Rome until the Protestant Reformation, Eastern Christians did not have a central authority. They organized regionally, resulting in a strong connection between the religious leaders, the national political leader, and the national language. This bond is reflected in the names of the churches, such as the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and the Romanian Orthodox Church. There are also Oriental Orthodox Churches based in Egypt, Syria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and India.

Besides this political difference, Eastern Orthodox Christians differ in other ways from Roman Catholics – and from Protestants. One is that their religious rituals are longer and more ornate. The priests wear richly ornamented vestments (garments), icons (painted pictures of Jesus, Mary, and the saints) are important, and incense is burned as an offering to God. Most of the rituals are sung rather than recited, and musical instruments are not used. On about half the days of the year, too, Orthodox Christians are required to fast (abstain from food and drink) to some degree.

In their theology, Eastern Orthodox Christians rely heavily on the writings of early Greek Fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil the Great, and St. John Chrysostom. These men lived long before Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) created the Atonement Theory of Jesus' crucifixion. That theory said that Jesus's death paid the debt owed by the human race for the Original Sin of Adam. By the time Anselm, and later Martin Luther and John Calvin, were teaching the Atonement Theory, Greek Orthodox Christians had split away from Western Christianity. So they never adopted the Atonement Theory. This makes their explanation of what Jesus did, and what Christian life is, different from what Catholics and Protestants believe.

In Orthodox theology, God created human beings in his image and wanted them to grow in likeness to him. The central goal of life is **theosis**, becoming like God and unified with



**FIGURE 6.11** Greek Orthodox priests, Palm Sunday procession. © Hanan Isachar/SuperStock.

God. Jesus became the God–man in order to bring humanity and divinity together. As St. Athanasius of Alexandria said, Jesus “was made man that we might be made God.” Therefore, in the Orthodox perspective, Jesus saved the human race not by paying a debt for sin, but by allowing people to join more fully with the life of God.

### ***The Protestant Reformation***

At the end of the Middle Ages there was another major split among Christians, the **Protestant Reformation**, when the German monk Martin Luther (d. 1546) challenged Roman Catholic authorities over what he considered corrupt practices and false doctrines. In 1517 he wrote a list of **Ninety-Five Theses** and circulated them among friends and

bishops he thought would be sympathetic to reforming the church. According to legend, he also nailed his document to the door of the church in Wittenberg.

A major complaint of Luther's was about the church's selling **indulgences**, which are reductions in the time a dead person would have to suffer in **Purgatory** before entering heaven. According to a Christian teaching articulated at the First Council of Lyon in the 13th century, Purgatory is a state of suffering endured by the dead whose sins keep them from being fully reconciled with God. The effects of their sins are "purged" by a fire like that of hell. When people received an indulgence from the church, this would shorten their time in Purgatory after they died; a plenary (full) indulgence would eliminate their time in Purgatory altogether. The church taught that indulgences could be earned by saying certain prayers, by doing good works, and by contributing money to the support of good works. By Luther's day, abuses of the sale of indulgences had become widespread. Indulgence salesmen traveled the countryside, with little accountability for the funds they collected.

Luther also objected to several of the church's teachings. One was that both faith and good works are necessary for salvation. Luther taught that faith in Jesus' redemptive death alone (*sola fides*) is necessary for salvation. Following Augustine, he said that because people inherit the effects of Original Sin from Adam and Eve, they are unable to choose good actions without God's favor or "grace." And there is nothing we can do to earn God's grace. According to Luther, people do not even have free will. So when someone does something good, this is a result of God's grace, not of the person's choice. There is nothing people can do to earn salvation; it is totally a gift of God. All that is necessary for salvation is to have faith in Jesus.

Another church teaching that Luther rejected is that both the Bible and church traditions are authoritative. Here he had in mind the documents issued by popes and church councils. Luther said that the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) is the foundation of Christian belief.

A few decades after Luther launched his reform movement in Germany, John Calvin (d. 1564), a French lawyer, started another movement in France and Switzerland. Even more than Luther, Calvin emphasized the devastating effects of Original Sin.

Good men, and beyond all others Augustine, have labored to demonstrate that we derive an innate depravity from our very birth.... Even before we behold the light of life, we are in the sight of God defiled and polluted. (Calvin, 1964, book II, i, 6–7)

For Calvin, every newborn baby deserves unending punishment in hell for its depravity. Not only is there no free will and therefore nothing people can do to help themselves, but from all eternity God knew whom he would choose to save and who would be damned. This teaching is called **predestination**. Different groups influenced by Calvin came to be known as Calvinists, Reformed Christians, Presbyterians, and Puritans.

In England, too, there were major disagreements with the Roman Catholic Church, but they centered around church authority rather than doctrine. So through the Reformation period, the Church of England remained "catholic," and is still known as the Anglican Catholic Church (or A.C., for short).

In the 17th through 19th centuries, hundreds more Protestant groups arose – Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, Mennonites, Seventh-Day Adventists, etc. Each had its own pattern of

beliefs and practices, but all had some disagreements with the Catholic Church. The major things challenged by the reformers were teachings about Purgatory, the authority of the pope, devotion to the saints, mandatory celibacy for priests, **monasticism** (the renunciation of worldly life and withdrawal to a “monastery” to live a life devoted to spiritual development), most of the sacraments (see below), and infant baptism.

## Christian Rituals

Among the 34,000 sects of Christians, there is a wide variety of rituals. Quakers assemble in a simple room and sit quietly waiting for divine inspiration before they speak. Russian Orthodox liturgies involve elaborate vestments, icons, and incense, and they can last hours.

The Roman Catholic Church has seven special rituals called **sacraments**. The Catholic understanding of sacraments is that they are rituals established by Jesus that have spiritual effects on participants. The seven are Baptism (which is believed to neutralize some of the negative effects of Original Sin), Holy Communion (or Eucharist – re-enacting Jesus’ last meal and his sacrificial and salvific death), Penance (or Confession or Reconciliation – telling a priest one’s misdeeds and receiving forgiveness), Confirmation (marking the passage to adult moral responsibility), Matrimony, Holy Orders (ordination into the priesthood), and Anointing of the Sick (or Extreme Unction, which includes forgiveness of sins). Most Protestant denominations have only two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion, also called the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist.

## Christianity Today

As we saw in Chapter 1, there are now 9,000 denominations that call themselves Christian, and they are subdivided into 34,000 sects. Some of these groups trace their lineage to Jesus and the Apostles, but thousands more, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), were started in the 19th and 20th centuries. The process of churches splitting that launched the Protestant Reformation is still common today. As we write this, some members of the Episcopal Church are planning to split off from that church because of the consecration of V. Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Episcopal bishop.

In the 20th century, many Christian churches went in the opposite direction from splitting, in what is known as the “ecumenical movement.” They emphasized what Christian groups had in common rather than their differences. They held conferences and conducted services together. Some groups even fused. The best known ecumenical group is the World Council of Churches, which has members from 349 Christian groups in 120 countries. In 1999, the Lutheran World Federation Council and the Roman Catholic Church put to rest one of the biggest disagreements between Protestants and Catholics over the last five centuries – the nature of justification (the process of God’s making people righteous before him). Wrapping up discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics that started in the early 1970s, the two groups signed a joint declaration on the nature of justification. The Methodist Church added its signature to this declaration in 2006.



The number of Christians worldwide is about 2.1 billion, making Christianity the largest religion. In different parts of the world, the power and influence of Christian churches varies considerably. In Britain and Western Europe, people's identification with churches and attendance at rituals have dropped considerably in the last century. In the U.S., evangelical Protestant churches have grown in numbers and strength each year, as traditional Protestant churches such as the Lutherans and Methodists have lost members. The largest increase in church membership is taking place in the developing world – especially in Africa – where 23,000 people a day join a Christian church.

The largest Christian denomination is Catholicism, with 1.1 billion members – half of all Christians and one-sixth of the world's population. Although usually identified with the "Latin Rite" – the rituals familiar to European and American Catholics – the Catholic Church includes 22 Eastern rites too, such as the Coptic Catholic rite that originated in Egypt.

## Unit III Islam

### The History and Teachings of Islam

#### Core Teachings

The history of Islam is, in the Islamic perspective, the history of monotheism. This is a core assumption in Islamic scripture, the Qur'an ("Koran" in archaic spelling). The Qur'an refers to the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, Abraham and the covenant, Moses and the Torah, Jesus and the Gospels, and many other prophets and figures from the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, but it does not tell the stories in detail or even in chronological order. Instead, the Qur'an says that it is reminding people of these stories. These stories comprise the background to the messages conveyed in the Qur'an. They are part of the history of the community of those who believe in the one and only God. The term for "god" in Arabic, which is the language of the Qur'an, is *ilah*. The Qur'an refers to God as "*the god*," *al-ilah* or **Allah**, saying repeatedly that "there is no god but God." God created human beings and immediately began communicating with them about how to live successfully and fulfill the purpose for which they were created. All human beings are called upon to submit to the will of God by establishing justice. In doing so, they will be following the **din**, the term used by the Qur'an to summarize the core of the monotheistic tradition.

We have seen that the Hebrew Bible uses the same term. This is not surprising, since Hebrew and Arabic are closely related Semitic languages. What is perhaps surprising, though, is that neither the Hebrew Bible nor the Qur'an uses a term that translates easily into the English term "religion." As we saw in Chapter 1, *din* in both Hebrew and Arabic means "judgment" – in particular, divine judgment.

Human beings will all be judged on the Last Day, the *yom al-din*, "the day of judgment." And all people are called upon to make their own decisions in light of that reality. So *din* is