


**Hindu** ( [pronunciation](#) ([help](#)·[info](#))) refers to any person who regards themselves as culturally, ethnically, or religiously adhering to aspects of [Hinduism](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup> It has historically been used as a geographical, cultural, and later religious identifier for people indigenous to [South Asia](#).<sup>[3][4]</sup>

The historical meaning of the term *Hindu* has evolved with time. Starting with the Persian and Greek references to the land of the [Indus](#) in the 1st millennium BCE through the texts of the medieval era,<sup>[5]</sup> the term Hindu implied a geographic, ethnic or cultural identifier for people living in the [Indian subcontinent](#) around or beyond the Sindhu ([Indus](#)) river.<sup>[6]</sup> By the 16th century, the term began to refer to residents of the subcontinent who were not Turkic or Muslims.<sup>[6][a][b]</sup>

The historical development of Hindu self-identity within the local South Asian population, in a religious or cultural sense, is unclear.<sup>[3][7]</sup> Competing theories state that Hindu identity developed in the British colonial era, or that it developed post-8th century CE after the Islamic invasion and medieval Hindu-Muslim wars.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup> A sense of Hindu identity and the term *Hindu* appears in some texts dated between the 13th and 18th century in Sanskrit and regional languages.<sup>[8][10]</sup> The 14th- and 18th-century Indian poets such as [Vidyapati](#), [Kabir](#) and [Eknath](#) used the phrase *Hindu dharma* (Hinduism) and contrasted it with *Turaka dharma* (Islam).<sup>[11]</sup> The Christian friar Sebastiao Manrique used the term 'Hindu' in religious context in 1649.<sup>[12]</sup> In the 18th century, the European merchants and colonists began to refer to the followers of [Indian religions](#) collectively as *Hindus*, in contrast to *Mohamedans* for Mughals and Arabs following Islam.<sup>[3][6]</sup> By the mid-19th century, colonial orientalist texts further distinguished Hindus from Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains,<sup>[3]</sup> but the colonial laws continued to consider all of them to be within the scope of the term *Hindu* until about mid-20th century.<sup>[13]</sup> Scholars state that the custom of distinguishing between Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs is a modern phenomenon.<sup>[14][15]</sup> **Hindoo** is an archaic spelling variant, whose use today may be considered derogatory.<sup>[16][17]</sup>

At more than 1.03 billion,<sup>[18]</sup> Hindus are the world's [third largest group](#) after [Christians](#) and [Muslims](#). The vast [majority of Hindus](#), approximately 966 million, live in India, according to India's 2011 census.<sup>[19]</sup> After India, the next 9 countries with the [largest Hindu populations](#) are, in decreasing order: [Nepal](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Indonesia](#), [Pakistan](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [United States](#), [Malaysia](#), [United Kingdom](#) and [Myanmar](#).<sup>[20]</sup> These together accounted for 99% of the world's Hindu population, and the remaining nations of the world together had about 6 million Hindus in 2010.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Etymology

A Hindu wedding ritual in India

Further information: Hinduism

The word Hindu is derived from the Indo-Aryan<sup>[21]</sup> and Sanskrit<sup>[21][5]</sup> word Sindhu, which means "a large body of water", covering "river, ocean".<sup>[22][note 1]</sup> It was used as the name of the Indus river and also referred to its tributaries. The actual term 'hindu' first occurs, states Gavin Flood, as "a Persian geographical term for the people who lived beyond the river Indus (Sanskrit: Sindhu)",<sup>[5]</sup> more specifically in the 6th-century BCE inscription of Darius I.<sup>[23]</sup> The Punjab region, called Sapta Sindhava in the Vedas, is called Hapta Hindu in Zend Avesta. The 6th-century BCE inscription of Darius I mentions the province of Hi[n]dush, referring to northwestern India.<sup>[23][24][25]</sup> The people of India were referred to as Hinduvān (Hindus) and hindavī was used as the adjective for Indian in the 8th century text Chachnama.<sup>[25]</sup> The term 'Hindu' in these ancient records is an ethno-geographical term and did not refer to a religion.<sup>[5][26]</sup> The Arabic equivalent Al-Hind likewise referred to the country of India.<sup>[27][23]</sup>

Hindu culture in Bali, Indonesia. The Krishna-Arjuna sculpture inspired by the Bhagavad Gita in Denpasar (top), and Hindu dancers in traditional dress.

Among the earliest known records of 'Hindu' with connotations of religion may be in the 7th-century CE Chinese text *Record of the Western Regions* by the Buddhist scholar Xuanzang. Xuanzang uses the transliterated term *In-tu* whose "connotation overflows in the religious" according to Arvind Sharma.[23] While Xuanzang suggested that the term refers to the country named after the moon, another Buddhist scholar I-tsing contradicted the conclusion saying that *In-tu* was not a common name for the country.[25]

Al-Biruni's 11th-century text *Tarikh Al-Hind*, and the texts of the Delhi Sultanate period use the term 'Hindu', where it includes all non-Islamic people such as Buddhists, and retains the ambiguity of being "a region or a religion".[23] The 'Hindu' community occurs as the amorphous 'Other' of the Muslim community in the court chronicles, according to Romila Thapar.[28] Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that 'Hindu' retained its geographical reference initially: 'Indian', 'indigenous, local', virtually 'native'. Slowly, the Indian groups themselves started using the term, differentiating themselves and their "traditional ways" from those of the invaders.[29]

The text *Prithviraj Raso*, by Chanda Baradai, about the 1192 CE defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan at the hands of Muhammad Ghori, is full of references to "Hindus" and "Turks", and at one stage, says "both the religions have drawn their curved swords;" however, the date of this text is unclear and considered by most scholars to be more recent.[30] In Islamic literature, 'Abd al-Malik Isami's Persian work, *Futuhu's-salatin*, composed in the Deccan in 1350, uses the word 'hindi' to mean Indian in the ethno-geographical sense and the word 'hindu' to mean 'Hindu' in the sense of a follower of the Hindu religion".[30] The poet Vidyapati's poem *Kirtilata* contrasts the cultures of Hindus and Turks (Muslims) in a city and concludes "The Hindus and the Turks live close together; Each makes fun of the other's religion (dhamme)".[31] One of the earliest uses of word 'Hindu' in religious context in a European language (Spanish), was the publication in 1649 by Sebastiao Manrique.[12]

Other prominent mentions of 'Hindu' include the epigraphical inscriptions from Andhra Pradesh kingdoms who battled military expansion of Muslim dynasties in the 14th century, where the word 'Hindu' partly implies a religious identity in contrast to 'Turks' or Islamic religious identity.[32] The term Hindu was later used occasionally in some Sanskrit texts such as the later *Rajataranginis* of Kashmir (*Hinduka*, c. 1450) and some 16th- to 18th-century Bengali Gaudiya Vaishnava texts, including *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and *Chaitanya Bhagavata*. These texts used it to contrast Hindus from Muslims who are called *Yavanas* (foreigners) or *Mlecchas* (barbarians), with the 16th-century *Chaitanya Charitamrita* text and the 17th-century *Bhakta Mala* text using the phrase "Hindu dharma".[10]

## Terminology

Hindus at Har Ki Pauri, Haridwar near river Ganges in Uttarakhand state of India.

### Medieval-era usage (8th to 18th century)

One of the earliest but ambiguous uses of the word Hindu is, states Arvind Sharma, in the 'Brahmanabad settlement' which Muhammad ibn Qasim made with non-Muslims after the Arab invasion of northwestern Sindh region of India, in 712 CE. The term 'Hindu' meant people who were non-Muslims, and it included Buddhists of the region.[33] In the 11th-century text of Al Biruni, Hindus are referred to as "religious antagonists" to Islam, as those who believe in rebirth, presents them to hold a diversity of beliefs, and seems to oscillate between Hindus holding a centralist and pluralist religious views.[33] In the texts of Delhi Sultanate era, states Sharma, the term Hindu remains ambiguous on whether it means people of a region or religion, giving the example of Ibn Battuta's explanation of the name "Hindu Kush" for a mountain range in Afghanistan. It was so called, wrote Ibn Battuta, because many Indian slaves died there of snow cold, as they were marched across that mountain range. The term Hindu there is ambivalent and could mean geographical region or religion.[34]

In the texts from the Mughal Empire era, the term Hindu appears to refer to the people of India who had not converted to Islam. Pashaura Singh states, "in Persian writings, Sikhs were regarded as Hindu in the sense of non-Muslim Indians".[35] Jahangir, for example, called the Sikh Guru Arjan a Hindu, who pretends to be a saint:[36]

There was a Hindu named Arjan in Gobindwal on the banks of the Beas River. Pretending to be a spiritual guide, he had won over as devotees many simple-minded Indians and even some ignorant, stupid Muslims by broadcasting his claims to be a saint. They called him Guru. ... When Khusraw stopped at his residence, [Arjan] came out and had an interview with [Khusraw]. Giving him some elementary spiritual precepts picked up here and there, he made a mark with saffron on his forehead, which is called qashqa in the idiom of the Hindus and which they consider lucky.

— Emperor Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 27b-28a (Translated by Wheeler Thackston)[37][note 2]

### Colonial-era usage (18th to 20th century)

The distribution of Indian religions in British India (1909). The upper map shows distribution of Hindus, the lower of Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs.

During the colonial era, the term Hindu had connotations of native religions of India, that is religions other than Christianity and Islam.[38] In early colonial era Anglo-Hindu laws and British India court system, the term Hindu referred to people of all Indian religions and two non-Indian religions:

The colonial project was itself undermined by its own constitutive contradictions since many of these laws were no more intrinsic to Indian society than the proposed meld of English and Indian systems. (...) The application of laws derived from Sanskrit classical texts leveled the community of Hindus to include all those who were not Muslims or Christians, and it absorbed under the category of "Hindu" both outcastes and members of religions as diverse as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.

— Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, [38]

The 20th-century colonial laws of British India segregated people's rights by their religion, evolving to provide Muslims with Sharia law, Christians, Jews and Parsis of British India with their own religious laws. The British government created a compendium of religious laws for Hindus, and the term 'Hindu' in these colonial 'Hindu laws', decades before India's independence, applied to Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs.[13]

Beyond the stipulations of British law, colonial orientalist and particularly the influential Asiatic Researches founded in the 18th century, later called The Asiatic Society, initially identified just two religions in India – Islam, and Hinduism. These orientalist included all Indian religions such as Buddhism as a subgroup of Hinduism in the 18th century.[3] These texts called followers of Islam as Mohamedans, and all others as Hindus. The text, by the early 19th century, began dividing Hindus into separate groups, for chronology studies of the various beliefs. Among the earliest terms to emerge were Seeks and their College (later spelled Sikhs by Charles Wilkins), Boudhism (later spelled Buddhism), and in the 9th volume of Asiatic Researches report on religions in India, the term Jainism received notice.[3]

According to Pennington, the terms Hindu and Hinduism were thus constructed for colonial studies of India. The various sub-divisions and separation of subgroup terms were assumed to be result of "communal conflict", and Hindu was constructed by these orientalist to imply people who adhered to "ancient default oppressive religious substratum of India", states Pennington.[3] Followers of other Indian religions so identified were later referred Buddhists, Sikhs or Jains and distinguished from Hindus, in an antagonistic two-dimensional manner, with Hindus and Hinduism stereotyped as irrational traditional and others as rational reform religions. However, these mid-19th-century reports offered no indication of doctrinal or ritual differences between Hindu and Buddhist, or other newly constructed religious identities.[3] These colonial studies, states Pennigton, "puzzled endlessly about the Hindus and intensely scrutinized them, but did not interrogate and avoided reporting the practices and religion of Mughal and Arabs in South Asia", and often relied on Muslim scholars to characterise Hindus.[3]

## Contemporary usage

A young Nepali Hindu devotee during a traditional prayer ceremony at Kathmandu's Durbar Square

In contemporary era, the term Hindus are individuals who identify with one or more aspects of Hinduism, whether they are practising or non-practicing or Laissez-faire.[39] The term does not include those who identify with other Indian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism or various animist tribal religions found in India such as Sarnaism.[40][41] The term Hindu, in contemporary parlance, includes people who accept themselves as culturally or ethnically Hindu rather than with a fixed set of religious beliefs within Hinduism.[1] One need not be religious in the minimal sense, states Julius Lipner, to be accepted as Hindu by Hindus, or to describe oneself as Hindu.[42]

Hindus subscribe to a diversity of ideas on spirituality and traditions, but have no ecclesiastical order, no unquestionable religious authorities, no governing body, no prophet(s) nor any binding holy book; Hindus can choose to be polytheistic, pantheistic, monotheistic, monistic, agnostic, atheistic or humanist.[43][44][45] Because of the wide range of traditions and ideas covered by the term Hinduism, arriving at a comprehensive definition is difficult.[5] The religion "defies our desire to define and categorize it".[46] A Hindu may, by his or her choice, draw upon ideas of other Indian or non-Indian religious thought as a resource, follow or evolve his or her personal beliefs, and still identify as a Hindu.[1]

In 1995, Chief Justice P. B. Gajendragadkar was quoted in an Indian Supreme Court ruling:[47][48]

When we think of the Hindu religion, unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet; it does not worship any one god; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more.

Although Hinduism contains a broad range of philosophies, Hindus share philosophical concepts, such as but not limiting to dharma, karma, kama, artha, moksha and samsara, even if each subscribes to a diversity of views.[49] Hindus also have shared texts such as the Vedas with embedded Upanishads, and common ritual grammar (Sanskara (rite of passage)) such as rituals during a wedding or when a baby is born or cremation rituals.[50][51] Some Hindus go on pilgrimage to shared sites they consider spiritually significant, practice one or more forms of bhakti or puja, celebrate mythology and epics, major festivals, love and respect for guru and family, and other cultural traditions.[49][52] A Hindu could:

follow any of the Hindu schools of philosophy, such as Advaita (non-dualism), Vishishtadvaita (non-dualism of the qualified whole), Dvaita (dualism), Dvaitadvaita (dualism with non-dualism), etc.[53][54]

follow a tradition centred on any particular form of the Divine, such as Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, etc.[55]

practice any one of the various forms of yoga systems in order to achieve moksha – that is freedom in current life (jivanmukti) or salvation in after-life (videhamukti);[56]

practice bhakti or puja for spiritual reasons, which may be directed to one's guru or to a divine image.[57] A visible public form of this practice is worship before an idol or statue. Jeaneane Fowler states that non-Hindu observers often confuse this practice as "stone or idol-worship and nothing beyond it", while for many Hindus, it is an image which represents or is symbolic manifestation of a spiritual Absolute (Brahman).[57] This practice may focus on a metal or stone statue, or a photographic image, or a linga, or any object or tree (pipal) or animal (cow) or tools of one's profession, or sunrise or expression of nature or to nothing at all, and the practice may involve meditation, japa, offerings or songs.[57][58] Inden states that this practice means different things to different Hindus, and has been misunderstood, misrepresented as idolatry, and various rationalisations have been constructed by both Western and native Indologists.[59]

### Disputes

In the Constitution of India, the word "Hindu" has been used in some places to denote persons professing any of these religions: Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism or Sikhism.[60] This however has been challenged by the Sikhs[40][61] and by neo-Buddhists who were formerly Hindus.[62] According to Sheen and Boyle, Jains have not objected to being covered by personal laws termed under 'Hindu',[62] but Indian courts have acknowledged that Jainism is a distinct religion.[63]

The Republic of India is in the peculiar situation that the Supreme Court of India has repeatedly been called upon to define "Hinduism" because the Constitution of India, while it prohibits "discrimination of any citizen" on grounds of religion in article 15, article 30 foresees special rights for "All minorities, whether based on religion or language". As a consequence, religious groups have an interest in being recognised as distinct from the Hindu majority in order to qualify as a "religious minority". Thus, the Supreme Court was forced to consider the question whether Jainism is part of Hinduism in 2005 and 2006. In the 2006 verdict, the Supreme Court found that the "Jain Religion is indisputably not a part of the Hindu Religion".[63]

### History of Hindu identity

Starting after the 10th century and particularly after the 12th century Islamic invasion, states Sheldon Pollock, the political response fused with the Indic religious culture and doctrines.[8] Temples dedicated to deity Rama were built from north to south India, and textual records as well as hagiographic inscriptions began comparing the Hindu epic of Ramayana to regional kings and their response to Islamic attacks. The Yadava king of Devagiri named Ramacandra, for example states Pollock, is described in a 13th-century record as, "How is this Rama to be described.. who freed Varanasi from the mlechha (barbarian, Turk Muslim) horde, and built there a golden temple of Sarngadhara".[8] Pollock notes that the Yadava king Ramacandra is described as a devotee of deity Shiva (Shaivism), yet his political

achievements and temple construction sponsorship in Varanasi, far from his kingdom's location in the Deccan region, is described in the historical records in Vaishnavism terms of Rama, a deity Vishnu avatar.[8] Pollock presents many such examples and suggests an emerging Hindu political identity that was grounded in the Hindu religious text of Ramayana, one that has continued into the modern times, and suggests that this historic process began with the arrival of Islam in India.[64]

Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya has questioned the Pollock theory and presented textual and inscriptional evidence.[65] According to Chattopadhyaya, the Hindu identity and religious response to Islamic invasion and wars developed in different kingdoms, such as wars between Islamic Sultanates and the Vijayanagara kingdom (Karnataka), and Islamic raids on the kingdoms in Tamil Nadu. These wars were described not just using the mythical story of Rama from Ramayana, states Chattopadhyaya, the medieval records used a wide range of religious symbolism and myths that are now considered as part of Hindu literature.[9][65] This emergence of religious with political terminology began with the first Muslim invasion of Sindh in the 8th century CE, and intensified 13th century onwards. The 14th-century Sanskrit text, Madhuravijayam, a memoir written by Gangadevi, the wife of Vijayanagara prince, for example describes the consequences of war using religious terms,[66]

I very much lament for what happened to the groves in Madhura,  
The coconut trees have all been cut and in their place are to be seen,  
rows of iron spikes with human skulls dangling at the points,  
In the highways which were once charming with anklets sound of beautiful women,  
are now heard ear-piercing noises of Brahmins being dragged, bound in iron-fetters,  
The waters of Tambraparni, which were once white with sandal paste,  
are now flowing red with the blood of cows slaughtered by miscreants,  
Earth is no longer the producer of wealth, nor does Indra give timely rains,  
The God of death takes his undue toll of what are left lives if undestroyed by the Yavanas [Muslims],[67]  
The Kali age now deserves deepest congratulations for being at the zenith of its power,  
gone is the sacred learning, hidden is refinement, hushed is the voice of Dharma.

— Madhuravijayam, Translated by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya[66]

The historiographic writings in Telugu language from the 13th- and 14th-century Kakatiya dynasty period presents a similar "alien other (Turk)" and "self-identity (Hindu)" contrast.[68] Chattopadhyaya, and other scholars,[69] state that the military and political campaign during the medieval era wars in Deccan peninsula of India, and in the north India, were no longer a quest for sovereignty, they

embodied a political and religious animosity against the "otherness of Islam", and this began the historical process of Hindu identity formation.[9][c]

Andrew Nicholson, in his review of scholarship on Hindu identity history, states that the vernacular literature of Bhakti movement sants from 15th to 17th century, such as Kabir, Anantadas, Eknath, Vidyapati, suggests that distinct religious identities, between Hindus and Turks (Muslims), had formed during these centuries.[71] The poetry of this period contrasts Hindu and Islamic identities, states Nicholson, and the literature vilifies the Muslims coupled with a "distinct sense of a Hindu religious identity".[71]

Hindu identity amidst other Indian religions

Hindus celebrating their major festivals, Holi (top) and Diwali.

Scholars state that Hindu, Buddhist and Jain identities are retrospectively-introduced modern constructions.[15] Inscriptional evidence from the 8th century onwards, in regions such as South India suggests that medieval era India, at both elite and folk religious practices level, likely had a "shared religious culture", [15] and their collective identities were "multiple, layered and fuzzy".[72] Even among Hinduism denominations such as Shaivism and Vaishnavism, the Hindu identities, states Leslie Orr, lacked "firm definitions and clear boundaries".[72]

Overlaps in Jain-Hindu identities have included Jains worshipping Hindu deities, intermarriages between Jains and Hindus, and medieval era Jain temples featuring Hindu religious icons and sculpture.[73][74][75] Beyond India, on Java island of Indonesia, historical records attest to marriages between Hindus and Buddhists, medieval era temple architecture and sculptures that simultaneously incorporate Hindu and Buddhist themes,[76] where Hinduism and Buddhism merged and functioned as "two separate paths within one overall system", according to Ann Kenney and other scholars.[77] Similarly, there is an organic relation of Sikhs to Hindus, states Zaehner, both in religious thought and their communities, and virtually all Sikhs' ancestors were Hindus.[78] Marriages between Sikhs and Hindus, particularly among Khatris, were frequent.[78] Some Hindu families brought up a son as a Sikh, and some Hindus view Sikhism as a tradition within Hinduism, even though the Sikh faith is a distinct religion.[78]

Julius Lipner states that the custom of distinguishing between Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs is a modern phenomena, but one that is a convenient abstraction.[14] Distinguishing Indian traditions is a fairly recent practice, states Lipner, and is the result of "not only Western preconceptions about the nature of religion in general and of religion in India in particular, but also with the political awareness that has arisen in India" in its people and a result of Western influence during its colonial history.[14]



## Sacred geography

Scholars such as Fleming and Eck state that the post-Epic era literature from the 1st millennium CE amply demonstrate that there was a historic concept of the Indian subcontinent as a sacred geography, where the sacredness was a shared set religious ideas. For example, the twelve Jyotirlingas of Shaivism and fifty-one Shaktipithas of Shaktism are described in the early medieval era Puranas as pilgrimage sites around a theme.[79][80][81] This sacred geography and Shaiva temples with same iconography, shared themes, motifs and embedded legends are found across India, from the Himalayas to hills of South India, from Ellora Caves to Varanasi by about the middle of 1st millennium.[79][82] Shakti temples, dated to a few centuries later, are verifiable across the subcontinent. Varanasi as a sacred pilgrimage site is documented in the Varanasimahatmya text embedded inside the Skanda Purana, and the oldest versions of this text are dated to 6th to 8th-century CE.[83][84]

The idea of twelve sacred sites in Shiva Hindu tradition spread across the Indian subcontinent appears not only in the medieval era temples but also in copper plate inscriptions and temple seals discovered in different sites.[85] According to Bhardwaj, non-Hindu texts such as the memoirs of Chinese Buddhist and Persian Muslim travellers attest to the existence and significance of the pilgrimage to sacred geography among Hindus by later 1st millennium CE.[86]

According to Fleming, those who question whether the term Hindu and Hinduism are a modern construction in a religious context present their arguments based on some texts that have survived into the modern era, either of Islamic courts or of literature published by Western missionaries or colonial-era Indologists aiming for a reasonable construction of history. However, the existence of non-textual evidence such as cave temples separated by thousands of kilometers, as well as lists of medieval era pilgrimage sites is evidence of a shared sacred geography and existence of a community that was self-aware of shared religious premises and landscape.[87][84] Further, it is a norm in evolving cultures that there is a gap between the "lived and historical realities" of a religious tradition and the emergence of related "textual authorities".[85] The tradition and temples likely existed well before the medieval era Hindu manuscripts appeared that describe them and the sacred geography. This, states Fleming, is apparent given the sophistication of the architecture and the sacred sites along with the variance in the versions of the Puranic literature.[87][88] According to Diana L. Eck and other Indologists such as André Wink, Muslim invaders were aware of Hindu sacred geography such as Mathura, Ujjain, and Varanasi by the 11th-century. These sites became a target of their serial attacks in the centuries that followed.[84]

## Hindu persecution

Main article: Persecution of Hindus

The Hindus have been persecuted during the medieval and modern era. The medieval persecution included waves of plunder, killing, destruction of temples and enslavement by Turk-Mongol Muslim armies from central Asia. This is documented in Islamic literature such as those relating to 8th century

Muhammad bin-Qasim,[89] 11th century Mahmud of Ghazni,[90][91] the Persian traveler Al Biruni,[92] the 14th century Islamic army invasion led by Timur,[93] and various Sunni Islamic rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire.[94][95][96] There were occasional exceptions such as Akbar who stopped the persecution of Hindus,[96] and occasional severe persecution such as under Aurangzeb[97][99][d] who destroyed temples, forcibly converted non-muslims to Islam and banned the celebration of Hindu festivals such as Holi and Diwali.[100]

Other recorded persecution of Hindus include those under the reign of 18th century Tipu Sultan in south India,[101][102] and during the colonial era.[103][104][105] In the modern era, religious persecution of Hindus have been reported outside India.[106][107][108]

## Hindu nationalism

### Main articles: Hindu nationalism and Hindutva

Christophe Jaffrelot states that modern Hindu nationalism was born in Maharashtra, in the 1920s, as a reaction to the Islamic Khilafat Movement wherein Indian Muslims championed and took the cause of the Turkish Ottoman sultan as the Caliph of all Muslims, at the end of the World War I.[109][110] Hindus viewed this development as one of divided loyalties of Indian Muslim population, of pan-Islamic hegemony, and questioned whether Indian Muslims were a part of an inclusive anti-colonial Indian nationalism.[110] The Hindu nationalism ideology that emerged, states Jeffrelot, was codified by Savarkar while he was a political prisoner of the British colonial empire.[109][111]

Chris Bayly traces the roots of Hindu nationalism to the Hindu identity and political independence achieved by the Maratha confederacy, that overthrew the Islamic Mughal empire in large parts of India, allowing Hindus the freedom to pursue any of their diverse religious beliefs and restored Hindu holy places such as Varanasi.[112] A few scholars view Hindu mobilisation and consequent nationalism to have emerged in the 19th century as a response to British colonialism by Indian nationalists and neo-Hinduism gurus.[113][114][115] Jaffrelot states that the efforts of Christian missionaries and Islamic proselytizers, during the British colonial era, each of whom tried to gain new converts to their own religion, by stereotyping and stigmatising Hindus to an identity of being inferior and superstitious, contributed to Hindus re-asserting their spiritual heritage and counter cross examining Islam and Christianity, forming organisations such as the Hindu Sabhas (Hindu associations), and ultimately a Hindu-identity driven nationalism in the 1920s.[116]

The colonial era Hindu revivalism and mobilisation, along with Hindu nationalism, states Peter van der Veer, was primarily a reaction to and competition with Muslim separatism and Muslim nationalism.[117] The successes of each side fed the fears of the other, leading to the growth of Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism in the Indian subcontinent.[117] In the 20th century, the sense of religious nationalism grew in India, states van der Veer, but only Muslim nationalism succeeded with the formation of the West and East Pakistan (later split into Pakistan and Bangladesh), as "an Islamic state"

upon independence.[118][119][120] Religious riots and social trauma followed as millions of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs moved out of the newly created Islamic states and resettled into the Hindu-majority post-British India.[121] After the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Hindu nationalism movement developed the concept of Hindutva in second half of the 20th century.[122]

The Hindu nationalism movement has sought to reform Indian laws, that critics say attempts to impose Hindu values on India's Islamic minority. Gerald Larson states, for example, that Hindu nationalists have sought a uniform civil code, where all citizens are subject to the same laws, everyone has equal civil rights, and individual rights do not depend on the individual's religion.[123] In contrast, opponents of Hindu nationalists remark that eliminating religious law from India poses a threat to the cultural identity and religious rights of Muslims, and people of Islamic faith have a constitutional right to Islamic shariah-based personal laws.[123][124] A specific law, contentious between Hindu nationalists and their opponents in India, relates to the legal age of marriage for girls.[125] Hindu nationalists seek that the legal age for marriage be eighteen that is universally applied to all girls regardless of their religion and that marriages be registered with local government to verify the age of marriage. Muslim clerics consider this proposal as unacceptable because under the shariah-derived personal law, a Muslim girl can be married at any age after she reaches puberty.[125]

Hindu nationalism in India, states Katharine Adeney, is a controversial political subject, with no consensus about what it means or implies in terms of the form of government and religious rights of the minorities.[126]

## Demographics

Main article: Hinduism by country

Hinduism by country, worldmap (estimate 2010).[127]

According to Pew Research, there are over 1 billion Hindus worldwide (15% of world's population).[128] Along with Christians (31.5%), Muslims (23.2%) and Buddhists (7.1%), Hindus are one of the four major religious groups of the world.[129]

Most Hindus are found in Asian countries. The countries with most Hindu residents and citizens include (in decreasing order) are India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United States, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Myanmar, Canada, Mauritius, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Guyana, Suriname.[20][128]

The fertility rate, that is children per woman, for Hindus is 2.4, which is less than the world average of 2.5.[130] Pew Research projects that there will be 1.161 billion Hindus by 2020.[131]

## Hindus in the World (2010)

Region	Total Population	Hindus	% total
Africa	885,103,542	2,013,705	0.23%
Asia	3,903,418,706	1,014,348,412	26.01%
Europe	728,571,703	2,030,904	0.28%
Americas	883,197,750	6,481,937	0.28%
Oceania	36,659,000	616,000	1.78%

In more ancient times, Hindu kingdoms arose and spread the religion and traditions across Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand, Nepal, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, and what is now central Vietnam.[citation needed]

Over 3 million Hindus are found in Bali Indonesia, a culture whose origins trace back to ideas brought by Tamil Hindu traders to Indonesian islands in the 1st millennium CE. Their sacred texts are also the Vedas and the Upanishads.[132] The Puranas and the Itihasa (mainly Ramayana and the Mahabharata) are enduring traditions among Indonesian Hindus, expressed in community dances and shadow puppet (wayang) performances. As in India, Indonesian Hindus recognises four paths of spirituality, calling it Catur Marga.[133] Similarly, like Hindus in India, Balinese Hindu believe that there are four proper goals of human life, calling it Catur Purusartha - dharma (pursuit of moral and ethical living), artha (pursuit of wealth and creative activity), kama (pursuit of joy and love) and moksha (pursuit of self-knowledge and liberation).[134][135]

## Islam

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## Islam

This article is part of a series on:

## Islam

Allah1.png

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v t e

Islam (Arabic: الإسلام, Al-Islam (Submission)) is a religion that believes in one God (Allah). All of its teachings and beliefs are written out in the Qur'an (also spelled Quran or Koran), the holy scriptures of Islam. People who follow Islam are called Muslims. They believe that the Qur'an was spoken to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel, and that it is the word of Allah. They view Muhammad as a prophet. Other beliefs and rules about what Muslims should do come from reports of what Muhammad taught.

Muslims believe that there were many other prophets before Muhammad, including the Prophet Adam, the Prophet Noah, the Prophet Abraham, the Prophet Moses and the Prophet Jesus. They believe that all these prophets were given messages by God of the oneness of God to their communities at different times in history of mankind, but Satan made the past communities deviate from the message of oneness and other social codes. Muslims believe that the content of the Qur'an (written in Arabic) is protected by Allah as mentioned in the Quran and is the final message of God for all of mankind until the day of judgment.

Most Muslims belong to one of two groups. The most common is Sunni Islam (71–80% of all Muslims are Sunni Muslims). The second is Shia Islam (10–20% of all Muslims are Shias – also called Shiites). But there are many more groups like the Alevis in Turkey.

With about 1.8 billion followers(24% of the world's population), Islam is the second-largest religion in the world. Islam is also the fastest-growing religion in the world.

The country in the world where the most people are Muslim is Indonesia.[1]

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Meaning of the word "Islam"[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

The word Islam comes from the Arabic word "islām" (إسلام) which means "peace".

Beliefs and practices[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

Men praying in a mosque.

The Qur'an is the holy book to muslims. They believe it holds the revealed word of Allah

The Kaaba at night.

The Five Pillars of Islam[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

Main page: Five Pillars of Islam

According to Islamic Tradition, there are five basic things that Muslims should do. They are called "The Five Pillars of Islam":

Tawheed: The Testimony (faith in English) is the Muslim belief that there is no god but Allah himself, and that Muhammad is his last messenger.

Salaat: Muslims pray five times a day, at special times of the day. When they pray, they face the holy city of Mecca. Salat is namaz in Persian, Turkish and Urdu. Shia Muslims can pray the afternoon and evening prayers right after each other.[2]

Zakaat: Muslims who have money must give 1/40th of their money (charity in English) to help people who do not have money or need help.

Sawm or Siyam: Fasting during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year. Muslims do not eat or drink from dawn till sunset for one lunar month. After Ramadan, there is a holiday called Eid al-Fitr (which means "festival of end-fast" in English). On Eid al-Fitr, Muslims usually go to the mosque in the morning for a special religious service, and then have a party with families and friends.

Hajj (Pilgrimage in English): During the pilgrimage season, many Muslims go to Mecca, the holiest city of Islam. If a Muslim cannot make the hajj because they do not have the money or are not healthy enough, they do not have to.

Qur'an[change | change source]

The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam. Muslims believe the Qur'an is the word of God.

Islam teaches that God revealed his message to Muhammad through the Angel Jibraeel (Gabriel) who is the same angel who brought God's message to the previous prophets. The Qur'an teaches Muslims to follow the right path by only doing good to please God. Muslims believe Allah alone decides who goes to Jannat (Heaven), and that doing good in this lifetime will bring them closer to God.

The Qur'an has a total of 30 paaras. In each paaras, there are many rokus verses. Many Muslims try to memorize the entire Qur'an. A Muslim who does this is called a Hafiz or Hafez.

Other important books in Islam are the Sunnah (which tell about Mohammad's life) and the Hadith (which are collections of things that Muslims believe Muhammad said).

The Qur'an is considered in Islam as a manual to all of humanity and its teachings are to be implemented and shared by its readers.

Place of worship[change | change source]

Muslims pray in a masjid, like this one in Jerusalem.

Muslims pray in a place of worship called the mosque. A mosque is called a masjid in Arabic. Most masjids have at least one dome, and some have one or more towers. But a masjid does not need to have a dome or tower.

Muslims take their shoes off before entering the masjid to pray. Prayer is one of the most important things that a Muslim does.

Prayer[change | change source]

MENU0:00

A Sunni version of the call to prayer

The Muslim is called to prayer five times a day. This call to prayer is called Adhan. The muezzin, a man chosen to make the call to prayer, uses a loudspeaker, which carries his voice to the people nearby. The call to prayer is often done out loud, in public, in Muslim countries. Being called to prayer is a normal part of daily life for most people in Muslim countries.

A prayer mat

Sometimes, Muslims pray on a mat, which is called a prayer mat or prayer rug in English. Common Arabic names[3] for the prayer mat include sajjāda and namazlık.

When it is time to pray, Muslims will figure out the direction of Qibla - the direction they are supposed to pray in, towards Mecca. They then roll out their prayer mat, and say their prayers to God.

Peace be upon him[change | change source]

According to Islamic teachings, Muslims must say "Peace be upon him" (PBUH or pbuh) whenever they hear Prophet's name. In this way, they show respect to Muhammad and other Prophets.

Islam in the world[change | change source]

Countries where more than half the people are Muslim

In 2009, a study was done in 232 countries and territories.[4] This study found that 23% of the global population or 1.57 billion people are Muslims. Of those, between 75% and 90% are Sunni[5][6] and between ten and twenty five percent are Shi'a.[4][5][7] A small part belong to other Islamic sects. In



about fifty countries, more than half of the people are Muslim.[8] Arabs account for around twenty percent of all Muslims worldwide. Islam has three holy sites; Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina.

Most Muslims live in Asia and Africa.[9] Around 62% of the world's Muslims live in Asia, with over 683 million followers in Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.[10][11] In the Middle East, non-Arab countries such as Turkey and Iran are the largest Muslim-majority countries; in Africa, Egypt and Nigeria have the biggest Muslim communities.[12]

Most estimates indicate that the People's Republic of China has about 20 to 30 million Muslims (1.5% to 2% of the population).[13][14][15][16] However, data provided by the San Diego State University's International Population Center to U.S. News & World Report suggests that China has 65.3 million Muslims.[17] Islam is the second largest religion after Christianity in many European countries,[18] and is slowly catching up to that status in the Americas.

Different denominations[change | change source]

Like with other religions, over time different movements have developed in Islam. These movements are based on different interpretations of the scriptures. The following sections list the most common movements.

Non-denominational Muslims are Muslims who don't follow any branch and simply call themselves Muslim. They are also called Ghayr Muqallids.

The Muwahidin or Muwahid Muslims are a Muslim restoration movement that accepts mainstream Islam, but prefer to orient themselves towards a primacy of God's commands on issues pertaining to sharia law. Muwahidists believe that modern Islam has been mixed with many cultural traditions and they want to change that.

The Shi'ites believe that just as only God can appoint a prophet, he can appoint a second leader after the prophet. Shi'a Muslims believe that God chose Ali as the leader after Muhammad. About 10-20% of Muslims are Shi'a which means that there are about 120 million world wide. Shi'a Muslims form the majority of Muslims in Iran, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon. The largest adhab in Yemen is Zaydi Shia. Shias commonly gather for Day of Ashura in Karbala. They accept four hadiths.

Sunnism considers Abu Bakr to be the successor of Muhammad. Sunnis make up roughly 75% of Muslims.[6][19] Sunnis believe that leaders of Islam should be chosen by the people of the Muslim world. After Abu Bakr died, Omar took his place, then Uthman, and then Ali. All of them were companions of the Muhammad and lived in Medina. Sunni beliefs are typically based on the Qur'an and the Kutub al-Sittah (six hadiths). Sunnis are sometimes called Bukharists.

Sufi whirling dervishes in Turkey

The Sufi are a branch in Islam that focuses more on the spiritual and mystic elements of Islam. Sufis usually conclude their prayers with dhikr recitations.

The Quraniyoon generally reject the authority of the hadiths. Such Muslims, also known as Quranists and Ahle Quran, believe that the Quran is the only source of guidance. They say the hadiths are not endorsed by the Quran, and some call them an innovative bid'ah.

Ibadis are Muslims who originated from the Kharijites. Ibadis today have reformed beliefs from original Kharijites.

Ahmadiyyas are Muslims who follow Mirza Ghulam Ahmed whom they consider to be the mahdi. They are divided into two subgroups; the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement.[20]

The Nation of Islam is a denomination in Islam primarily geared towards African Americans.

The Five-Percent Nation, a denomination predominantly consisting of African Americans, also known as Nation of Gods and Earths.

Women in Islam[change | change source]

## Muslims in New York City

Women have a great and honoured place in Islam, Quran has a chapter titled "Women" and another chapter titled "Mariam" which is a testament to the importance of women in Quran.[source?].

The Wife of Pharaoh sought forgiveness and submitted herself to the belief in One God and was mentioned in the Qur'an for her change in faith and most merciful nature of Allah.

The blessed water well of Zam Zam was created for Hajra the wife of Prophet Ibrahim.

In the muslim pilgrimage of Umrah & Haj the ritual of Safa & Marwa has been included to remember the faith, trust and sacrifices made by a woman "Hajra"

Men and women in Islam are required to lower their gaze towards the other gender, unless they are one of the exceptions mentioned above, such as family members.

The appropriate dress code of women codified in the Quran are often misrepresented as the only proper mention of it is in 24:31 calling for the covering of cleavage and "beauty spots". The aforementioned surrah starts with a rather flexible statement allowing for "that which is normally

shown". There are many cultural garments and traditions that have become synonymous with Islam although they are not mentioned in the Qur'an.[21]

Quran states clearly a woman's rights before, during and after a marriage and emphasises upon her rights during an unlikely event of divorce[22].[source?]

Quran clarifies the reward and respect of mothers as thrice that of fathers. It mentions that Allah loves men who treat their wives best and are just with them.

Quran states the rights of a woman in all cases of inheritance, so that a woman is given her inheritance justly and timely. The inheritance only ever being half that of an equivalent male.[23]

Quran states that a woman's testimony is worth only half of that of a man as one woman may "err" and need reminding by the other. [24]

In a marriage if a man fears that his wife is not being loyal or is rebellious then men are instructed to verbally counsel her, if this is not enough - then to separate his bed, if this too doesn't work then he is allowed to beat his wife as is fully explained in the Qur'an 4:34.[25]

Islamophobia[change | change source]

Main page: Islamophobia

Some people are afraid of Islam or do not like it. This is mostly because of attacks by Muslim extremists. The ulamas in the whole world believe that these extremists should not have the title of muslim as they do not obey the word of Allah SWT in the Quran. It is prove so as Allah mention in the Quran that a muslim should not kill a muslim or a non muslim. It is because in future those people might change and submit their will to god.

Some people have responded to these forms of criticism. Montgomery Watt and Norman Daniel say that some of the criticisms are the product of old myths and prejudice.[26][27] Carl Ernst writes that Islamophobia has played a part in establishing what he calls "myths".[28]

Muslim scholars like Muhammad Mohar Ali argue against claims of discrepancies in the Qur'an and allegations that Muhammad was unduly influenced by Judeo-Christian tradition.[29]

Related pages[change | change source]

Christianity[<sup>note 1</sup>] is an Abrahamic monotheistic[<sup>1</sup>] religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who is the focal point of the Christian faith. It is the world's largest religion,[<sup>2</sup>][<sup>3</sup>] with over 2.4 billion followers,[<sup>4</sup>][<sup>5</sup>][<sup>6</sup>] or 33% of the global population, known as Christians.[<sup>note 2</sup>] Christians make up a majority of the population in 158 countries and territories.[<sup>6</sup>] They believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the savior of humanity whose coming as the Messiah (the Christ) was prophesied in the Old Testament.[<sup>7</sup>] Christianity has played a prominent role in the shaping of Western civilization.[<sup>8</sup>][<sup>9</sup>][<sup>10</sup>][<sup>11</sup>][<sup>12</sup>]

Christianity grew out of Judaism[<sup>13</sup>][<sup>14</sup>][<sup>15</sup>] and began as a Second Temple Judaic sect in the mid-1st century.[<sup>16</sup>][<sup>17</sup>] Originating in the Roman province of Judea, it quickly spread to Europe, Syria, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Transcaucasia, Egypt, Ethiopia and the Indian subcontinent, and by the end of the 4th century had become the official state church of the Roman Empire.[<sup>18</sup>][<sup>19</sup>][<sup>20</sup>] Following the Age of Discovery, Christianity spread to the Americas, Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world through missionary work and colonization.[<sup>21</sup>][<sup>22</sup>][<sup>23</sup>]

Christian theology is summarized in creeds such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. These professions of faith state that Jesus suffered, died, was buried, descended into hell, and rose from the dead, in order to grant eternal life to those who believe in him and trust in him for the remission of their sins. The creeds further maintain that Jesus physically ascended into heaven, where he reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and that he will return to judge the living and the dead and grant eternal life to his followers. His incarnation, earthly ministry, crucifixion and resurrection are often referred to as "the gospel", meaning "good news".[<sup>note 3</sup>] The term gospel also refers to written accounts of Jesus' life and teaching, four of which—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are considered canonical and included in the Christian Bible, as established by the 5th century[<sup>24</sup>] for the ancient undivided Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions before the East–West Schism.

Throughout its history, Christianity has weathered schisms and theological disputes that have resulted in many distinct churches and denominations. Worldwide, the largest branches of Christianity are the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodoxy, as well as thousands of denominations and congregations of Protestantism, the latter due to fundamentally different ecclesiology. The Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches broke communion with each other in the East–West Schism of 1054. Protestantism came into existence in the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, splitting from the Catholic Church.[<sup>25</sup>]

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## Beliefs

There are many important differences of interpretation and opinion of the Bible and sacred tradition on which Christianity is based.[26] Because of these irreconcilable differences in theology and a lack of consensus on the core tenets of Christianity, Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox often deny that members of certain other branches are Christians.[27]

## Creeds

Main articles: Creed § Christian creeds, and List of Christian creeds

Wikisource has original text related to this article:

### Apostles' Creed

Wikisource has original text related to this article:

### Nicene Creed

Concise doctrinal statements or confessions of religious beliefs are known as creeds (from Latin *credo*, meaning "I believe"). They began as baptismal formulae and were later expanded during the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries to become statements of faith.

Many evangelical Protestants reject creeds as definitive statements of faith, even while agreeing with some or all of the substance of the creeds. The Baptists have been non-creedal "in that they have not sought to establish binding authoritative confessions of faith on one another." [28]:p.111 Also rejecting creeds are groups with roots in the Restoration Movement, such as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Evangelical Christian Church in Canada and the Churches of Christ. [29][30]:14–15 [31]:123

An Eastern Christian icon depicting Emperor Constantine and the Fathers of the First Council of Nicaea (325) as holding the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed of 381

The Apostles' Creed is the most widely accepted statement of the articles of Christian faith. It is used by a number of Christian denominations for both liturgical and catechetical purposes, most visibly by

liturgical churches of Western Christian tradition, including the Latin Church of the Catholic Church, Lutheranism, Anglicanism and Western Rite Orthodoxy. It is also used by Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists. This particular creed was developed between the 2nd and 9th centuries. Its central doctrines are those of the Trinity and God the Creator. Each of the doctrines found in this creed can be traced to statements current in the apostolic period. The creed was apparently used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome.[32]

Its main points include:

Belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit

The death, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension of Christ

The holiness of the Church and the communion of saints

Christ's second coming, the Day of Judgement and salvation of the faithful.

The Nicene Creed was formulated, largely in response to Arianism, at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in 325 and 381 respectively [33][34] and ratified as the universal creed of Christendom by the First Council of Ephesus in 431.[35]

The Chalcedonian Definition, or Creed of Chalcedon, developed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451,[36] though rejected by the Oriental Orthodox churches,[37] taught Christ "to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably": one divine and one human, and that both natures, while perfect in themselves, are nevertheless also perfectly united into one person.[38]

The Athanasian Creed, received in the Western Church as having the same status as the Nicene and Chalcedonian, says: "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance." [39]

Most Christians (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Protestant alike) accept the use of creeds, and subscribe to at least one of the creeds mentioned above.[40]

Jesus

Various depictions of Jesus

Main articles: Jesus, Jesus in Christianity, and Christ (title)

See also: Jesus in comparative mythology

The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus, as the Messiah, was anointed by God as savior of humanity, and hold that Jesus' coming was the fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The Christian concept of the Messiah differs significantly from the contemporary Jewish concept. The core Christian belief is that through belief in and acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, sinful humans can be reconciled to God and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of eternal life.[41]

While there have been many theological disputes over the nature of Jesus over the earliest centuries of Christian history, generally Christians believe that Jesus is God incarnate and "true God and true man" (or both fully divine and fully human). Jesus, having become fully human, suffered the pains and temptations of a mortal man, but did not sin. As fully God, he rose to life again. According to the New Testament, he rose from the dead,[42] ascended to heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father[43] and will ultimately return[Acts 1:9–11] to fulfill the rest of Messianic prophecy, including the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment and final establishment of the Kingdom of God.

According to the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born from the Virgin Mary. Little of Jesus' childhood is recorded in the canonical gospels, although infancy gospels were popular in antiquity. In comparison, his adulthood, especially the week before his death, is well documented in the gospels contained within the New Testament, because that part of his life is believed to be most important. The biblical accounts of Jesus' ministry include: his baptism, miracles, preaching, teaching and deeds.

Death and resurrection

Main articles: Crucifixion of Jesus and Resurrection of Jesus

Crucifixion, representing the death of Jesus on the Cross, painting by Diego Velázquez, 17th century

Christians consider the resurrection of Jesus to be the cornerstone of their faith (see 1 Corinthians 15) and the most important event in history.[44] Among Christian beliefs, the death and resurrection of Jesus are two core events on which much of Christian doctrine and theology is based.[45] According to the New Testament, Jesus was crucified, died a physical death, was buried within a tomb and rose from the dead three days later.[Jn. 19:30–31] [Mk. 16:1] [16:6]

The New Testament mentions several resurrection appearances of Jesus on different occasions to his twelve apostles and disciples, including "more than five hundred brethren at once", [1Cor 15:6] before Jesus' Ascension to heaven. Jesus' death and resurrection are commemorated by Christians in all



worship services, with special emphasis during Holy Week which includes Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are usually considered the most important events in Christian theology, partly because they demonstrate that Jesus has power over life and death and therefore has the authority and power to give people eternal life.[46]

Christian churches accept and teach the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus with very few exceptions.[47] Some modern scholars use the belief of Jesus' followers in the resurrection as a point of departure for establishing the continuity of the historical Jesus and the proclamation of the early church.[48] Some liberal Christians do not accept a literal bodily resurrection,[49][50] seeing the story as richly symbolic and spiritually nourishing myth. Arguments over death and resurrection claims occur at many religious debates and interfaith dialogues.[51] Paul the Apostle, an early Christian convert and missionary, wrote, "If Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless." [1Cor 15:14] [52]

## Salvation

Main article: Salvation (Christianity)

Paul the Apostle, like Jews and Roman pagans of his time, believed that sacrifice can bring about new kinship ties, purity and eternal life.[53] For Paul, the necessary sacrifice was the death of Jesus: Gentiles who are "Christ's" are, like Israel, descendants of Abraham and "heirs according to the promise". [Gal. 3:29] [54] The God who raised Jesus from the dead would also give new life to the "mortal bodies" of Gentile Christians, who had become with Israel the "children of God" and were therefore no longer "in the flesh". [Rom. 8:9,11,16] [53]

Modern Christian churches tend to be much more concerned with how humanity can be saved from a universal condition of sin and death than the question of how both Jews and Gentiles can be in God's family. According to both Catholic and Protestant doctrine, salvation comes by Jesus' substitutionary death and resurrection. The Catholic Church teaches that salvation does not occur without faithfulness on the part of Christians; converts must live in accordance with principles of love and ordinarily must be baptized.[55][56] Martin Luther taught that baptism was necessary for salvation, but modern Lutherans and other Protestants tend to teach that salvation is a gift that comes to an individual by God's grace, sometimes defined as "unmerited favor", even apart from baptism.

Christians differ in their views on the extent to which individuals' salvation is pre-ordained by God. Reformed theology places distinctive emphasis on grace by teaching that individuals are completely incapable of self-redemption, but that sanctifying grace is irresistible.[57] In contrast Catholics,

Orthodox Christians and Arminian Protestants believe that the exercise of free will is necessary to have faith in Jesus.[58]

## Trinity

Main article: Trinity

The Trinity is the belief that God is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit.[59]

Trinity refers to the teaching that the one God[1] comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons; the Father, the Son (incarnate in Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. Together, these three persons are sometimes called the Godhead,[60][61][62] although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead.[63] In the words of the Athanasian Creed, an early statement of Christian belief, "the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God".[64] They are distinct from another: the Father has no source, the Son is begotten of the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Though distinct, the three persons cannot be divided from one another in being or in operation. While some Christians also believe that God appeared as the Father in the Old Testament, it is agreed that he appeared as the Son in the New Testament, and will still continue to manifest as the Holy Spirit in the present. But still, God still existed as three persons in each of these times.[65] However, traditionally there is a belief that it was the Son who appeared in the Old Testament because, for example, when the Trinity is depicted in art, the Son typically has the distinctive appearance, a cruciform halo identifying Christ, and in depictions of the Garden of Eden this looks forward to an Incarnation yet to occur. In some Early Christian sarcophagi the Logos is distinguished with a beard, "which allows him to appear ancient, even preexistent." [66]

The Trinity is an essential doctrine of mainstream Christianity. From earlier than the times of the Nicene Creed, 325, Christianity advocated[67] the triune mystery-nature of God as a normative profession of faith. According to Roger E. Olson and Christopher Hall, through prayer, meditation, study and practice, the Christian community concluded "that God must exist as both a unity and trinity", codifying this in ecumenical council at the end of the 4th century.[68] [69]

According to this doctrine, God is not divided in the sense that each person has a third of the whole; rather, each person is considered to be fully God (see Perichoresis). The distinction lies in their relations, the Father being unbegotten; the Son being begotten of the Father; and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and (in Western Christian theology) from the Son. Regardless of this apparent difference, the three "persons" are each eternal and omnipotent. Other Christian religions including Unitarian Universalism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism and others do not share those views on the Trinity.

The Latin word *trias*, from which *trinity* is derived, is first seen in the works of Theophilus of Antioch. He wrote of "the Trinity of God (the Father), His Word (the Son) and His Wisdom (Holy Spirit)".[70] The term may have been in use before this time. Afterwards it appears in Tertullian.[71][72] In the following century the word was in general use. It is found in many passages of Origen.[73]

## Trinitarians

Main article: Trinitarianism

Trinitarianism denotes those Christians who believe in the concept of the Trinity. Almost all Christian denominations and churches hold Trinitarian beliefs. Although the words "Trinity" and "Triune" do not appear in the Bible, theologians beginning in the 3rd century developed the term and concept to facilitate comprehension of the New Testament teachings of God as being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since that time, Christian theologians have been careful to emphasize that Trinity does not imply that there are three gods (the antitrinitarian heresy of Tritheism), nor that each hypostasis of the Trinity is one-third of an infinite God (partialism), nor that the Son and the Holy Spirit are beings created by and subordinate to the Father (Arianism). Rather, the Trinity is defined as one God in three Persons.[74]

## Nontrinitarianism

Main article: Nontrinitarianism

Nontrinitarianism (or antitrinitarianism) refers to theology that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. Various nontrinitarian views, such as adoptionism or modalism, existed in early Christianity, leading to the disputes about Christology.[75] Nontrinitarianism later appeared again in the Gnosticism of the Cathars in the 11th through 13th centuries, among groups with Unitarian theology in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century,[76] in the 18th-century Enlightenment and in some groups arising during the Second Great Awakening of the 19th century.

## Scriptures

Main articles: Bible, Biblical canon, Development of the Christian Biblical canon, and Christian scripture

The Bible is the sacred book in Christianity.

Christianity, like other religions, has adherents whose beliefs and biblical interpretations vary. Christianity regards the biblical canon, the Old Testament and the New Testament, as the inspired word of God. The traditional view of inspiration is that God worked through human authors so that what they produced was what God wished to communicate. The Greek word referring to inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16 is *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed".[77]

Some believe that divine inspiration makes our present Bibles inerrant. Others claim inerrancy for the Bible in its original manuscripts, although none of those are extant. Still others maintain that only a particular translation is inerrant, such as the King James Version.[78][79][80] Another closely related view is Biblical infallibility or limited inerrancy, which affirms that the Bible is free of error as a guide to salvation, but may include errors on matters such as history, geography or science.

The books of the Bible accepted by the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches vary somewhat, with Jews accepting only the Hebrew Bible as canonical; there is however substantial overlap. These variations are a reflection of the range of traditions, and of the councils that have convened on the subject. Every version of the Old Testament always includes the books of the Tanakh, the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The Catholic and Orthodox canons, in addition to the Tanakh, also include the Deuterocanonical Books as part of the Old Testament. These books appear in the Septuagint, but are regarded by Protestants to be apocryphal. However, they are considered to be important historical documents which help to inform the understanding of words, grammar and syntax used in the historical period of their conception. Some versions of the Bible include a separate Apocrypha section between the Old Testament and the New Testament.[81] The New Testament, originally written in Koine Greek, contains 27 books which are agreed upon by all churches.

Modern scholarship has raised many issues with the Bible. While the Authorized King James Version is held to by many because of its striking English prose, in fact it was translated from the Erasmus Greek Bible which in turn "was based on a single 12th Century manuscript that is one of the worst manuscripts we have available to us".[82] Much scholarship in the past several hundred years has gone into comparing different manuscripts in order to reconstruct the original text. Another issue is that several books are considered to be forgeries. The injunction that women "be silent and submissive" in 1 Timothy 2[83] is thought by many to be a forgery by a follower of Paul, a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 14,[84] which is thought to be by Paul, appears in different places in different manuscripts and is thought to originally be a margin note by a copyist.[82] Other verses in 1 Corinthians, such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 where women are instructed to wear a covering over their hair "when they pray or prophesies", [85] contradict this verse.

A final issue with the Bible is the way in which books were selected for inclusion in the New Testament. Other Gospels have now been recovered, such as those found near Nag Hammadi in 1945, and while some of these texts are quite different from what Christians have been used to, it should be understood that some of this newly recovered Gospel material is quite possibly contemporaneous with, or even earlier than, the New Testament Gospels. The core of the Gospel of Thomas, in particular, may date from as early as AD 50 (although some major scholars contest this early dating),[86] and if so would provide an insight into the earliest gospel texts that underlie the canonical Gospels, texts that are mentioned in Luke 1:1–2. The Gospel of Thomas contains much that is familiar from the canonical Gospels—verse 113, for example ("The Father's Kingdom is spread out upon the earth, but people do not see it"),[87] is reminiscent of Luke 17:20–21[88][89]—and the Gospel of John, with a terminology and approach that is suggestive of what was later termed Gnosticism, has recently been seen as a

possible response to the Gospel of Thomas, a text that is commonly labelled proto-Gnostic. Scholarship, then, is currently exploring the relationship in the Early Church between mystical speculation and experience on the one hand and the search for church order on the other, by analyzing new-found texts, by subjecting canonical texts to further scrutiny, and by an examination of the passage of New Testament texts to canonical status.

## Catholic interpretation

St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, the largest church in the world and a symbol of the Catholic Church

Main article: Catholic theology of Scripture

In antiquity, two schools of exegesis developed in Alexandria and Antioch. Alexandrine interpretation, exemplified by Origen, tended to read Scripture allegorically, while Antiochene interpretation adhered to the literal sense, holding that other meanings (called *theoria*) could only be accepted if based on the literal meaning.[90]

Catholic theology distinguishes two senses of scripture: the literal and the spiritual.[91]

The literal sense of understanding scripture is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture. The spiritual sense is further subdivided into:

The allegorical sense, which includes typology. An example would be the parting of the Red Sea being understood as a "type" (sign) of baptism.[1Cor 10:2]

The moral sense, which understands the scripture to contain some ethical teaching.

The anagogical sense, which applies to eschatology, eternity and the consummation of the world

Regarding exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation, Catholic theology holds:

The injunction that all other senses of sacred scripture are based on the literal[92][93]

That the historicity of the Gospels must be absolutely and constantly held[94]

That scripture must be read within the "living Tradition of the whole Church"[95] and

That "the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome".[96]

## Protestant interpretation

Protestants believe Martin Luther's basic beliefs against the Catholic Church: Sola scriptura (by Scripture alone), Sola fide (by faith alone), Sola gratia (by grace alone), Solus Christus (through Christ alone) and Soli Deo gloria (glory to God alone).

#### Clarity of Scripture

Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is a self-sufficient revelation, the final authority on all Christian doctrine, and revealed all truth necessary for salvation. This concept is known as sola scriptura.[97] Protestants characteristically believe that ordinary believers may reach an adequate understanding of Scripture because Scripture itself is clear (or "perspicuous"), because of the help of the Holy Spirit, or both. Martin Luther believed that without God's help Scripture would be "enveloped in darkness".[98] He advocated "one definite and simple understanding of Scripture".[98] John Calvin wrote, "all who refuse not to follow the Holy Spirit as their guide, find in the Scripture a clear light." [99] The Second Helvetic Confession, composed by the pastor of the Reformed church in Zürich (successor to Protestant reformer Zwingli) was adopted as a declaration of doctrine by most European Reformed churches.[100]

#### Original intended meaning of Scripture

Protestants stress the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture, the historical-grammatical method.[101] The historical-grammatical method or grammatico-historical method is an effort in Biblical hermeneutics to find the intended original meaning in the text.[102] This original intended meaning of the text is drawn out through examination of the passage in light of the grammatical and syntactical aspects, the historical background, the literary genre as well as theological (canonical) considerations.[103] The historical-grammatical method distinguishes between the one original meaning and the significance of the text. The significance of the text includes the ensuing use of the text or application. The original passage is seen as having only a single meaning or sense. As Milton S. Terry said: "A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture." [104] Technically speaking, the grammatical-historical method of interpretation is distinct from the determination of the passage's significance in light of that interpretation. Taken together, both define the term (Biblical) hermeneutics.[102]

Some Protestant interpreters make use of typology.[105]

#### Eschatology

Main article: Christian eschatology

The 7th-century Khor Virap monastery in the shadow of Mount Ararat. Armenia was the first state to adopt Christianity as the state religion, in AD 301.[106]

The end of things, whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, or the end of the world, broadly speaking is Christian eschatology; the study of the destiny of humans as it is revealed in the

Bible. The major issues in Christian eschatology are the Tribulation, death and the afterlife, the Rapture, the Second Coming of Jesus, Resurrection of the Dead, Heaven and Hell, Millennialism, the Last Judgment, the end of the world and the New Heavens and New Earth.

Christians believe that the second coming of Christ will occur at the end of time after a period of severe persecution (the Great Tribulation). All who have died will be resurrected bodily from the dead for the Last Judgment. Jesus will fully establish the Kingdom of God in fulfillment of scriptural prophecies.[107][108]

## Death and afterlife

Most Christians believe that human beings experience divine judgment and are rewarded either with eternal life or eternal damnation. This includes the general judgement at the resurrection of the dead as well as the belief (held by Roman Catholics,[109][110] Orthodox[111][112] and most Protestants) in a judgment particular to the individual soul upon physical death.

In Roman Catholicism, those who die in a state of grace, i.e., without any mortal sin separating them from God, but are still imperfectly purified from the effects of sin, undergo purification through the intermediate state of purgatory to achieve the holiness necessary for entrance into God's presence.[113] Those who have attained this goal are called saints (Latin *sanctus*, "holy").[114]

Some Christian groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists, hold to mortalism, the belief that the human soul is not naturally immortal, and is unconscious during the intermediate state between bodily death and resurrection. These Christians also hold to Annihilationism, the belief that subsequent to the final judgement, the wicked will cease to exist rather than suffer everlasting torment. Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a similar view.[115]

## Worship

Main article: Christian worship

See also: Mass (liturgy), Reformed worship, and Contemporary worship

Samples of Catholic religious objects—the Bible, a crucifix and a rosary

Justin Martyr described 2nd-century Christian liturgy in his First Apology (c. 150) to Emperor Antoninus Pius, and his description remains relevant to the basic structure of Christian liturgical worship:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.[116]

Thus, as Justin described, Christians assemble for communal worship on Sunday, the day of the resurrection, though other liturgical practices often occur outside this setting. Scripture readings are drawn from the Old and New Testaments, but especially the gospel accounts. Often these are arranged on an annual cycle, using a book called a lectionary. Instruction is given based on these readings, called a sermon, or homily. There are a variety of congregational prayers, including thanksgiving, confession and intercession, which occur throughout the service and take a variety of forms including recited, responsive, silent, or sung. The Lord's Prayer, or Our Father, is regularly prayed.

A modern Protestant worship band leading a contemporary worship session

Some groups depart from this traditional liturgical structure. A division is often made between "High" church services, characterized by greater solemnity and ritual, and "Low" services, but even within these two categories there is great diversity in forms of worship. Seventh-day Adventists meet on Saturday, while others do not meet on a weekly basis. Charismatic or Pentecostal congregations may spontaneously feel led by the Holy Spirit to action rather than follow a formal order of service, including spontaneous prayer. Quakers sit quietly until moved by the Holy Spirit to speak.

Some evangelical services resemble concerts with rock and pop music, dancing and use of multimedia. For groups which do not recognize a priesthood distinct from ordinary believers the services are generally led by a minister, preacher, or pastor. Still others may lack any formal leaders, either in principle or by local necessity. Some churches use only a cappella music, either on principle (for example, many Churches of Christ object to the use of instruments in worship) or by tradition (as in Orthodoxy).

Nearly all forms of churchmanship celebrate the Eucharist (Holy Communion), which consists of a consecrated meal. It is reenacted in accordance with Jesus' instruction at the Last Supper that his followers do in remembrance of him as when he gave his disciples bread, saying, "This is my body", and



gave them wine saying, "This is my blood".[117] Some Christian denominations practice closed communion. They offer communion to those who are already united in that denomination or sometimes individual church. Catholics restrict participation to their members who are not in a state of mortal sin. Most other churches practice open communion since they view communion as a means to unity, rather than an end, and invite all believing Christians to participate.

Worship can be varied for special events like baptisms or weddings in the service or significant feast days. In the early church, Christians and those yet to complete initiation would separate for the Eucharistic part of the worship. In many churches today, adults and children will separate for all or some of the service to receive age-appropriate teaching. Such children's worship is often called Sunday school or Sabbath school (Sunday schools are often held before rather than during services).

## Sacraments

Main article: Sacrament

See also: Sacraments of the Catholic Church, Anglican sacraments, and Lutheran sacraments

### 2nd-century description of the Eucharist

And this food is called among us Eukaristia [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.

Justin Martyr[116]

In Christian belief and practice, a sacrament is a rite, instituted by Christ, that confers grace, constituting a sacred mystery. The term is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*, which was used to translate the Greek word for mystery. Views concerning both which rites are sacramental, and what it means for an act to be a sacrament, vary among Christian denominations and traditions.[118]

The most conventional functional definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, that conveys an inward, spiritual grace through Christ. The two most widely accepted sacraments are Baptism and the Eucharist (or Holy Communion), however, the majority of Christians also recognize five additional sacraments: Confirmation (Chrismation in the Orthodox tradition), Holy orders (ordination), Penance (or Confession), Anointing of the Sick and Matrimony (see Christian views on marriage).[118]

Taken together, these are the Seven Sacraments as recognized by churches in the High Church tradition—notably Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Independent Catholic, Old Catholic, many Anglicans and some Lutherans. Most other denominations and traditions typically affirm only Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments, while some Protestant groups, such as the Quakers, reject sacramental theology.[118] Christian denominations, such as Baptists, which believe these rites do not communicate grace, prefer to call Baptism and Holy Communion ordinances rather than sacraments.

In addition to this, the Church of the East has two additional sacraments in place of the traditional sacraments of Matrimony and the Anointing of the Sick. These include Holy Leaven (Melka) and the sign of the cross.[119]

Baptism, specifically infant baptism, in the Lutheran tradition

A penitent confessing his sins in a Ukrainian Catholic church

A Methodist minister celebrating the Eucharist

Confirmation being administered in an Anglican church

Ordination of a priest in the Eastern Orthodox tradition

Crowning during Holy Matrimony in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church

Service of the Sacrament of Holy Unction served on Great and Holy Wednesday

Liturgical calendar

Main article: Liturgical year

See also: Calendar of saints

A depiction of the Nativity with a Christmas tree backdrop

Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Eastern Christians and traditional Protestant communities frame worship around the liturgical year. The liturgical cycle divides the year into a series of seasons, each with their theological emphases, and modes of prayer, which can be signified by different ways of decorating churches, colours of paraments and vestments for clergy,[120] scriptural readings, themes for preaching and even different traditions and practices often observed personally or in the home.

Western Christian liturgical calendars are based on the cycle of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church,[120] and Eastern Christians use analogous calendars based on the cycle of their respective rites. Calendars set aside holy days, such as solemnities which commemorate an event in the life of Jesus, Mary or the saints, and periods of fasting, such as Lent and other pious events such as memoria or lesser festivals commemorating saints. Christian groups that do not follow a liturgical tradition often retain certain celebrations, such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost: these are the celebrations of Christ's birth, resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, respectively. A few denominations make no use of a liturgical calendar.[121]

Symbols

Main article: Christian symbolism

The cross and the fish are two common symbols of Jesus Christ. The letters of the Greek word ΙΧΘΥΣ Ichthys (fish) form an acronym for "Ιησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ", which translates into English as "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior".

Christianity has not generally practiced aniconism, or the avoidance or prohibition of types of images, even if the early Jewish Christians sects, as well as some modern denominations, preferred to some extent not to use figures in their symbols, by invoking the Decalogue's prohibition of idolatry.

The cross, which is today one of the most widely recognized symbols in the world, was used as a Christian symbol from the earliest times.[122][123] Tertullian, in his book *De Corona*, tells how it was already a tradition for Christians to trace repeatedly on their foreheads the sign of the cross.[124] Although the cross was known to the early Christians, the crucifix did not appear in use until the 5th century.[125]

Among the symbols employed by the primitive Christians, that of the fish or Ichthys seems to have ranked first in importance. From monumental sources such as tombs it is known that the symbolic fish was familiar to Christians from the earliest times. The fish was depicted as a Christian symbol in the first decades of the 2nd century.[126] Its popularity among Christians was due principally, it would seem, to the famous acrostic consisting of the initial letters of five Greek words forming the word for fish (Ichthys), which words briefly but clearly described the character of Christ and the claim to worship of believers: *Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter* (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ), meaning, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.[126]

Other major Christian symbols include the chi-rho monogram, the dove (symbolic of the Holy Spirit), the sacrificial lamb (symbolic of Christ's sacrifice), the vine (symbolizing the necessary connectedness of the Christian with Christ) and many others. These all derive from writings found in the New Testament.[125]

## Baptism

Main article: Baptism

### The baptism of Jesus depicted by Almeida Júnior

Baptism is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which a person is admitted to membership of the Church. Beliefs on baptism vary among denominations. Differences occur firstly on whether the act has any spiritual significance. Some, such as the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, as well as Lutherans and Anglicans, hold to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which affirms that baptism creates or strengthens a person's faith, and is intimately linked to salvation. Others view baptism as a purely symbolic act, an external public declaration of the inward change which has taken place in the person, but not as spiritually efficacious. Secondly, there are differences of opinion on the methodology of the act. These methods are: by immersion; if immersion is total, by submersion; by affusion (pouring); and by aspersion (sprinkling). Those who hold the first view may also adhere to the tradition of infant baptism;[127] the Orthodox Churches all practice infant baptism and always baptize by total immersion

repeated three times in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[128][129] The Catholic Church also practices infant baptism,[130] usually by affusion, and utilizing the Trinitarian formula.[131]

## Prayer

### Main article: Prayer in Christianity

Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount displays a distinct lack of interest in the external aspects of prayer. A concern with the techniques of prayer is condemned as 'pagan', and instead a simple trust in God's fatherly goodness is encouraged.[Mat. 6:5–15] Elsewhere in the New Testament this same freedom of access to God is also emphasized.[Phil. 4:6][Jam. 5:13–19] This confident position should be understood in light of Christian belief in the unique relationship between the believer and Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.[132]

In subsequent Christian traditions, certain physical gestures are emphasized, including medieval gestures such as genuflection or making the sign of the cross. Kneeling, bowing and prostrations (see also poklon) are often practiced in more traditional branches of Christianity. Frequently in Western Christianity the hands are placed palms together and forward as in the feudal commendation ceremony. At other times the older orans posture may be used, with palms up and elbows in.

Intercessory prayer is prayer offered for the benefit of other people. There are many intercessory prayers recorded in the Bible, including prayers of the Apostle Peter on behalf of sick persons[Acts 9:40] and by prophets of the Old Testament in favor of other people.[1Ki 17:19–22] In the Epistle of James, no distinction is made between the intercessory prayer offered by ordinary believers and the prominent Old Testament prophet Elijah.[Jam 5:16–18] The effectiveness of prayer in Christianity derives from the power of God rather than the status of the one praying.[132]

The ancient church, in both Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity, developed a tradition of asking for the intercession of (deceased) saints, and this remains the practice of most Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and some Anglican churches. Churches of the Protestant Reformation, however, rejected prayer to the saints, largely on the basis of the sole mediatorship of Christ.[133] The reformer Huldrych Zwingli admitted that he had offered prayers to the saints until his reading of the Bible convinced him that this was idolatrous.[134]

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." [135] The Book of Common Prayer in the Anglican tradition is a guide which provides a set order for church services, containing set prayers, scripture readings, and hymns or sung Psalms.

## History

Main article: History of Christianity

Early Church and Christological Councils

Main articles: Origins of Christianity, Early Christianity, and First seven Ecumenical Councils

Chapel of Saint Ananias, Damascus, Syria, an early example of a Christian house of worship; built in the 1st century AD

An early circular ichthys symbol, created by combining the Greek letters ΙΧΘΥΣ into a wheel. Ephesus, Asia Minor.

Kadisha Valley, Lebanon, home to some of the earliest Christian monasteries in the world

Christianity began as a Jewish sect in the Levant of the middle east in the mid-1st century. Other than Second Temple Judaism, the primary religious influences of early Christianity are Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism.[note 2][16][17][136] John Bowker states that Christian ideas such as "angels, the end of the world, a final judgment, the resurrection and heaven and hell received form and substance from ... Zoroastrian beliefs".[137] Its earliest development took place under the leadership of the remaining Twelve Apostles, particularly Saint Peter, and Paul the Apostle, followed by the early bishops, whom Christians consider the successors of the Apostles.

According to the Christian scriptures, Christians were from the beginning subject to persecution by some Jewish and Roman religious authorities, who disagreed with the apostles' teachings (See Split of early Christianity and Judaism). This involved punishments, including death, for Christians such as Stephen[Acts 7:59] and James, son of Zebedee.[Acts 12:2] Larger-scale persecutions followed at the hands of the authorities of the Roman Empire, first in the year 64, when Emperor Nero blamed them for the Great Fire of Rome. According to Church tradition, it was under Nero's persecution that early Church leaders Peter and Paul of Tarsus were each martyred in Rome.

Further widespread persecutions of the Church occurred under nine subsequent Roman emperors, most intensely under Decius and Diocletian. From the year 150, Christian teachers began to produce theological and apologetic works aimed at defending the faith. These authors are known as the Church Fathers, and study of them is called Patristics. Notable early Fathers include Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. However, Armenia is considered the first nation to accept Christianity in AD 301.[106][138][139]

King Trdat IV made Christianity the state religion in Armenia between 301 and 314, it was not an entirely new religion in Armenia. It penetrated into the country from at least the third century, but may have been present even earlier.[140]

End of Roman persecution under Emperor Constantine (AD 313)

An example of Byzantine pictorial art, the Deësis mosaic at the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople

State persecution ceased in the 4th century, when Constantine I issued an edict of toleration in 313. On 27 February 380, Emperor Theodosius I enacted a law establishing Nicene Christianity as the state church of the Roman Empire.[141] From at least the 4th century, Christianity has played a prominent role in the shaping of Western civilization.[142]

Constantine was also instrumental in the convocation of the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which sought to address the Arian heresy and formulated the Nicene Creed, which is still used by the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglican Communion and many Protestant churches.[40] Nicaea was the first of a series of Ecumenical (worldwide) Councils which formally defined critical elements of the theology of the Church, notably concerning Christology.[143] The Assyrian Church of the East did not accept the third and following Ecumenical Councils, and are still separate today.

The presence of Christianity in Africa began in the middle of the 1st century in Egypt, and by the end of the 2nd century in the region around Carthage. Mark the Evangelist started the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria in about AD 43.[144][145][146] Important Africans who influenced the early development of Christianity includes Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian, Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo. The later rise of Islam in North Africa reduced the size and numbers of Christian congregations, leaving only the Coptic Church in Egypt, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Horn of Africa and the Nubian Church in the Sudan (Nobatia, Makuria and Alodia).

In terms of prosperity and cultural life, the Byzantine Empire was one of the peaks in Christian history and Orthodox civilization,[147] and Constantinople remained the leading city of the Christian world in size, wealth and culture.[148] There was a renewed interest in classical Greek philosophy, as well as an increase in literary output in vernacular Greek.[149] Byzantine art and literature held a pre-eminent place in Europe, and the cultural impact of Byzantine art on the west during this period was enormous and of long lasting significance.[150]

Early Middle Ages

With the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the west, the papacy became a political player, first visible in Pope Leo's diplomatic dealings with Huns and Vandals.[151] The church also entered into a

long period of missionary activity and expansion among the various tribes. While Arianists instituted the death penalty for practicing pagans (see Massacre of Verden as example), Catholicism also spread among the Germanic peoples,[151] the Celtic and Slavic peoples, the Hungarians and the Baltic peoples. Christianity has been an important part of the shaping of Western civilization, at least since the 4th century.[9][10][142]

Around 500, St. Benedict set out his Monastic Rule, establishing a system of regulations for the foundation and running of monasteries.[151] Monasticism became a powerful force throughout Europe,[151] and gave rise to many early centers of learning, most famously in Ireland, Scotland and Gaul, contributing to the Carolingian Renaissance of the 9th century.

In the 7th century Muslims conquered Syria (including Jerusalem), North Africa and Spain. Part of the Muslims' success was due to the exhaustion of the Byzantine empire in its decades long conflict with Persia.[152] Beginning in the 8th century, with the rise of Carolingian leaders, the papacy began to find greater political support in the Frankish Kingdom.[153]

The Middle Ages brought about major changes within the church. Pope Gregory the Great dramatically reformed ecclesiastical structure and administration.[154] In the early 8th century, iconoclasm became a divisive issue, when it was sponsored by the Byzantine emperors. The Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787) finally pronounced in favor of icons.[155] In the early 10th century, Western Christian monasticism was further rejuvenated through the leadership of the great Benedictine monastery of Cluny.[156]

Hebraism, like Hellenism, has been an all-important factor in the development of Western Civilization; Judaism, as the precursor of Christianity, has indirectly had much to do with shaping the ideals and morality of western nations since the Christian era.[10]

## High and Late Middle Ages

Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont, where he preached the First Crusade

In the west, from the 11th century onward, older cathedral schools developed into universities (see University of Oxford, University of Paris and University of Bologna.) The traditional medieval universities—evolved from Catholic and Protestant church schools—then established specialized academic structures for properly educating greater numbers of students as professionals. Prof. Walter Rüegg, editor of *A History of the University in Europe*, reports that universities then only trained students to become clerics, lawyers, civil servants and physicians.[157]



Originally teaching only theology, universities steadily added subjects including medicine, philosophy and law, becoming the direct ancestors of modern institutions of learning.[158] The university is generally regarded as an institution that has its origin in the Medieval Christian setting.[159][160] Prior to the establishment of universities, European higher education took place for hundreds of years in Christian cathedral schools or monastic schools (*Scholae monasticae*), in which monks and nuns taught classes; evidence of these immediate forerunners of the later university at many places dates back to the 6th century AD.[161]

Accompanying the rise of the "new towns" throughout Europe, mendicant orders were founded, bringing the consecrated religious life out of the monastery and into the new urban setting. The two principal mendicant movements were the Franciscans[162] and the Dominicans[163] founded by St. Francis and St. Dominic respectively. Both orders made significant contributions to the development of the great universities of Europe. Another new order were the Cistercians, whose large isolated monasteries spearheaded the settlement of former wilderness areas. In this period church building and ecclesiastical architecture reached new heights, culminating in the orders of Romanesque and Gothic architecture and the building of the great European cathedrals.[164]

From 1095 under the pontificate of Urban II, the Crusades were launched.[165] These were a series of military campaigns in the Holy Land and elsewhere, initiated in response to pleas from the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I for aid against Turkish expansion. The Crusades ultimately failed to stifle Islamic aggression and even contributed to Christian enmity with the sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade.[166]

Over a period stretching from the 7th to the 13th century, the Christian Church underwent gradual alienation, resulting in a schism dividing it into a so-called Latin or Western Christian branch, the Roman Catholic Church,[167] and an Eastern, largely Greek, branch, the Orthodox Church. These two churches disagree on a number of administrative, liturgical and doctrinal issues, most notably papal primacy of jurisdiction.[168][169] The Second Council of Lyon (1274) and the Council of Florence (1439) attempted to reunite the churches, but in both cases the Eastern Orthodox refused to implement the decisions and the two principal churches remain in schism to the present day. However, the Roman Catholic Church has achieved union with various smaller eastern churches.

Beginning around 1184, following the crusade against the Cathar heresy,[170] various institutions, broadly referred to as the Inquisition, were established with the aim of suppressing heresy and securing religious and doctrinal unity within Christianity through conversion and prosecution.[171]

Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation

Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation in 1517 with the Ninety-Five Theses, going against the Catholic interpretation of the Bible.

Main articles: Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation

See also: European wars of religion

15th-century Renaissance brought about a renewed interest in ancient and classical learning. Another major schism, the Reformation, resulted in the splintering of the Western Christendom into several branches.[172] Martin Luther in 1517 protested against the sale of indulgences and soon moved on to deny several key points of Roman Catholic doctrine.[173]

Other reformers like Zwingli, Calvin, Knox and Arminius further criticized Roman Catholic teaching and worship. These challenges developed into the movement called Protestantism, which repudiated the primacy of the pope, the role of tradition, the seven sacraments and other doctrines and practices.[173] The Reformation in England began in 1534, when King Henry VIII had himself declared head of the Church of England. Beginning in 1536, the monasteries throughout England, Wales and Ireland were dissolved.[174]

Thomas Müntzer, Andreas Karlstadt and other theologians perceived both the Roman Catholic Church and the confessions of the Magisterial Reformation as corrupted. Their activity brought about the Radical Reformation, which gave birth to various Anabaptist denominations.

Michelangelo's Pietà in St. Peter's Basilica, The Catholic Church was among the patronages of the Renaissance.[175][176][177]

Partly in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church engaged in a substantial process of reform and renewal, known as the Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reform.[178] The Council of Trent clarified and reasserted Roman Catholic doctrine. During the following centuries, competition between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism became deeply entangled with political struggles among European states.[179]

Meanwhile, the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492 brought about a new wave of missionary activity. Partly from missionary zeal, but under the impetus of colonial expansion by the European powers, Christianity spread to the Americas, Oceania, East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Throughout Europe, the divides caused by the Reformation led to outbreaks of religious violence and the establishment of separate state churches in Europe. Lutheranism spread into northern, central and eastern parts of present-day Germany, Livonia and Scandinavia. Anglicanism was established in England

in 1534. Calvinism and its varieties (such as Presbyterianism) were introduced in Scotland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Switzerland and France. Arminianism gained followers in the Netherlands and Frisia. Ultimately, these differences led to the outbreak of conflicts in which religion played a key factor. The Thirty Years' War, the English Civil War and the French Wars of Religion are prominent examples. These events intensified the Christian debate on persecution and toleration.[180]

## Post-Enlightenment

A depiction of Madonna and Child in a 19th-century Kakure Kirishitan Japanese woodcut

In the era known as the Great Divergence, when in the West the Age of Enlightenment and the Scientific revolution brought about great societal changes, Christianity was confronted with various forms of skepticism and with certain modern political ideologies such as versions of socialism and liberalism.[181] Events ranged from mere anti-clericalism to violent outbursts against Christianity such as the Dechristianisation during the French Revolution,[182] the Spanish Civil War and certain Marxist movements, especially the Russian Revolution and the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union under state atheism.[183][184][185][186]

Especially pressing in Europe was the formation of nation states after the Napoleonic era. In all European countries, different Christian denominations found themselves in competition, to greater or lesser extents, with each other and with the state. Variables are the relative sizes of the denominations and the religious, political and ideological orientation of the state. Urs Altermatt of the University of Fribourg, looking specifically at Catholicisms in Europe, identifies four models for the European nations. In traditionally Catholic countries such as Belgium, Spain and to some extent Austria, religious and national communities are more or less identical. Cultural symbiosis and separation are found in Poland, Ireland and Switzerland, all countries with competing denominations. Competition is found in Germany, the Netherlands and again Switzerland, all countries with minority Catholic populations who to a greater or lesser extent did identify with the nation. Finally, separation between religion (again, specifically Catholicism) and the state is found to a great degree in France and Italy, countries where the state actively opposed itself to the authority of the Catholic Church.[187]

The combined factors of the formation of nation states and ultramontanistism, especially in Germany and the Netherlands but also in England (to a much lesser extent[188]), often forced Catholic churches, organizations and believers to choose between the national demands of the state and the authority of the Church, specifically the papacy. This conflict came to a head in the First Vatican Council, and in Germany would lead directly to the Kulturkampf, where liberals and Protestants under the leadership of Bismarck managed to severely restrict Catholic expression and organization.

Christian commitment in Europe dropped as modernity and secularism came into their own in Europe,[189] particularly in the Czech Republic and Estonia,[190] while religious commitments in America have been generally high in comparison to Europe. The late 20th century has shown the shift of Christian adherence to the Third World and southern hemisphere in general, with the western civilization no longer the chief standard bearer of Christianity.

Some Europeans (including diaspora), Indigenous peoples of the Americas and natives of other continents have revived their respective peoples' historical folk religions. Approximately 7.1 to 10% of Arabs are Christians,[191] most prevalent in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

## Demographics

Main articles: Christianity by country, Christian population growth, and Christian denominations by membership

See also: Christendom

With around 2.4 billion adherents,[4][5] split into three main branches of Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox, Christianity is the world's largest religion.[3] The Christian share of the world's population has stood at around 33% for the last hundred years, which says that one in three persons on earth are Christians. This masks a major shift in the demographics of Christianity; large increases in the developing world have been accompanied by substantial declines in the developed world, mainly in Europe and North America.[192] According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, within the next four decades, Christians will remain the world's largest religion; and by 2050, the Christian population is expected to exceed 3 billion.[193]:60

As a percentage of Christians, the Catholic Church and Orthodoxy (both Eastern and Oriental) are declining, while Protestants and other Christians are on the rise.[194][195][196] The so-called popular Protestantism[<sup>note 4</sup>] is one of the fastest growing religious categories in the world.[197][198]

Christianity is the predominant religion in Europe, the Americas and Southern Africa. In Asia, it is the dominant religion in Georgia, Armenia, East Timor and the Philippines.[199] However, it is declining in many areas including the Northern and Western United States,[200] Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), northern Europe (including Great Britain,[201] Scandinavia and other places), France, Germany, the Canadian provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec, and parts of Asia (especially the Middle East – due to the Christian emigration,[202][203][204] South Korea,[205] Taiwan,[206] and Macau[207]).

The Christian population is not decreasing in Brazil, the Southern United States[208] and the province of Alberta, Canada,[209] but the percentage is decreasing. In countries such as Australia[210] and New Zealand,[211] the Christian population are declining in both numbers and percentage.

Despite the declining numbers, Christianity remains the dominant religion in the Western World, where 70% are Christians.[6] A 2011 Pew Research Center survey found that 76.2% of Europeans, 73.3% in Oceania and about 86.0% in the Americas (90.0% in Latin America and 77.4% in North America) identified themselves as Christians.[6][212][213][214] By 2010 about 157 countries and territories in the world had Christian majorities.[3]

However, there are many charismatic movements that have become well established over large parts of the world, especially Africa, Latin America and Asia.[215][216][217][218][219] Since 1900, primarily due to conversion, Protestantism has spread rapidly in Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America.[220] From 1960 to 2000, the global growth of the number of reported Evangelical Protestants grew three times the world's population rate, and twice that of Islam.[221] St. Mary's University study estimated about 10.2 million Muslim convert to Christianity in 2015.[222] as well a significant numbers of Muslims converts to Christianity in Afghanistan,[223] Albania,[222] Azerbaijan[224][225] Algeria,[226][227] Belgium,[228] France,[227] Germany,[229] Iran,[230] India,[227] Indonesia,[231] Malaysia,[232] Morocco,[227][233] Russia,[227] Netherlands,[234] Saudi Arabia,[235] Tunisia,[222] Turkey,[227][236][237][238] Kazakhstan,[239] Kyrgyzstan,[222] Kosovo,[240] United States,[241] and Central Asia.[242][243] It is also reported that Christianity is popular among people of different backgrounds in India (mostly Hindus),[244][245] and Malaysia,[246] Mongolia,[247] Nigeria,[248] Vietnam,[249] Singapore,[250] Indonesia,[251][252] China,[253] Japan,[254] and South Korea.[255]

In most countries in the developed world, church attendance among people who continue to identify themselves as Christians has been falling over the last few decades.[256] Some sources view this simply as part of a drift away from traditional membership institutions,[257] while others link it to signs of a decline in belief in the importance of religion in general.[258] Europe's Christian population, though in decline, still constitutes the largest geographical component of the religion.[259] According to data from the 2012 European Social Survey, around a third of European Christians say they attend services once a month or more,[260] Conversely about more than two-thirds of Latin American Christians and according to the World Values Survey about 90% of African Christians (in Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe) said they attended church regularly.[260]

Christianity, in one form or another, is the sole state religion of the following nations: Argentina (Roman Catholic),[261] Tuvalu (Reformed), Tonga (Methodist), Norway (Lutheran),[262][263][264] Costa Rica (Roman Catholic),[265] Kingdom of Denmark (Lutheran),[266] England (Anglican),[267] Georgia (Georgian Orthodox),[268] Greece (Greek Orthodox),[269] Iceland (Lutheran),[270] Liechtenstein (Roman Catholic),[271] Malta (Roman Catholic),[272] Monaco (Roman Catholic),[273] and Vatican City (Roman Catholic).[274]

There are numerous other countries, such as Cyprus, which although do not have an established church, still give official recognition and support to a specific Christian denomination.[275]

Demographics of major traditions within Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2010 data)[276]

Tradition	Followers	% of the Christian population		% of the world population	
	Follower dynamics	Dynamics in- and outside Christianity			
Catholic Church	1,094,610,000	50.1	15.9	Increase Growing	Decrease Declining
Protestantism	800,640,000	36.7	11.6	Increase Growing	Increase Growing
Orthodoxy	260,380,000	11.9	3.8	Decrease Declining	Decrease Declining
Other Christianity	28,430,000	1.3	0.4	Increase Growing	Increase Growing
Christianity	2,184,060,000	100	31.7	Increase Growing	Steady Stable

The global distribution of Christians: Countries colored a darker shade have a higher proportion of Christians.[277]

Countries with 50% or more Christians are colored purple while countries with 10% to 50% Christians are colored pink

Nations with Christianity as their state religion are in blue

Nations with Christianity as their state religion (detailed map; see legend for more)

Distribution of Roman Catholics

Distribution of Protestants

Distribution of Eastern Orthodox

Distribution of Oriental Orthodox

Other Christians by number: black - more than 10 million; red - more than 1 million

Major denominations

Further information: List of Christian denominations and List of Christian denominations by number of members

The three primary divisions of Christianity are Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism.[31]:14[278] However, there are other Christian groups that do not fit neatly into one of these primary categories.[279] The Nicene Creed is accepted as authoritative by most Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and major Protestant churches.[280]

There is a diversity of doctrines and practices among groups calling themselves Christian. These groups are sometimes classified under denominations, though for theological reasons many groups reject this classification system.[281] A broader distinction that is sometimes drawn is between Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity, which has its origins in the East–West Schism (Great Schism) of the 11th century.

In addition to the Lutheran and Reformed (or Calvinist) branches of the Reformation, there is Anglicanism after the English Reformation. The Anabaptist tradition was largely ostracized by the other Protestant parties at the time, but has achieved a measure of affirmation in more recent history. Adventist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal and other Protestant confessions arose in the following centuries.

As well as these modern divisions, there were many diverse Christian communities with wildly different Christologies, eschatologies, soteriologies and cosmologies that existed alongside the "Early Church" which is itself a projected concept to indicate which communities were "proto-orthodox", in that their views would become dominate. In many ways, the first three centuries of Christianity was significantly more diverse than the modern Church.[282]

Catholic Church

Main article: Catholic Church

Pope Francis, the current leader of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church consists of those particular Churches, headed by bishops, in communion with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, as its highest authority in matters of faith, morality and Church governance.[283][284] Like Eastern Orthodoxy, the Roman Catholic Church, through apostolic succession, traces its origins to the Christian community founded by Jesus Christ.[285][286] Catholics maintain that the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" founded by Jesus subsists fully in the Roman Catholic Church, but also acknowledges other Christian churches and communities[287][288] and works towards reconciliation among all Christians.[287] The Catholic faith is detailed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.[289][290]

The 2,834 sees[291] are grouped into 24 particular autonomous Churches (the largest of which being the Latin Church), each with its own distinct traditions regarding the liturgy and the administering the sacraments.[292] With more than 1.1 billion baptized members, the Catholic Church is the largest Christian church and represents over half of all Christians as well as one sixth of the world's population.[293][294][295]



## Eastern Orthodox Church

Main article: Eastern Orthodox Church

The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow is the tallest Eastern Orthodox Christian church in the world.

The Eastern Orthodox Church consists of those churches in communion with the Patriarchal Sees of the East, such as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.[296] Like the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church also traces its heritage to the foundation of Christianity through apostolic succession and has an episcopal structure, though the autonomy of its component parts is emphasized, and most of them are national churches. A number of conflicts with Western Christianity over questions of doctrine and authority culminated in the Great Schism. Eastern Orthodoxy is the second largest single denomination in Christianity, with an estimated 225–300 million adherents.[6][294][297]

## Oriental Orthodoxy

Main article: Oriental Orthodoxy

The Oriental Orthodox churches (also called "Old Oriental" churches) are those eastern churches that recognize the first three ecumenical councils—Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus—but reject the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon and instead espouse a Miaphysite christology. The Oriental Orthodox communion consists of six groups: Syriac Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Eritrean Orthodox, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (India) and Armenian Apostolic churches.[298] These six churches, while being in communion with each other are completely independent hierarchically.[299] These churches are generally not in communion with Eastern Orthodox Churches with whom they are in dialogue for erecting a communion.[300]

## Assyrian Church of the East

Main article: Assyrian Church of the East

The Assyrian Church of the East, with an unbroken patriarchate established in the 17th century, is an independent Eastern Christian denomination which claims continuity from the Church of the East - in parallel to the Catholic patriarchate established in the 16th century that evolved into the Chaldean Catholic Church, an Eastern Catholic church in full communion with the Pope.

## Protestantism

Main article: Protestantism

Part of a series on

Protestantism

Latin version of the Christian cross, used by virtually all Protestant denominations.

Topics[show]

Major branches[show]

Minor branches[show]

Interdenominational

movements[show]

Other developments[show]

Related movements[show]

v t e

In the 16th century, Martin Luther, and subsequently Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin, inaugurated what has come to be called Protestantism. Luther's primary theological heirs are known as Lutherans. Zwingli and Calvin's heirs are far broader denominationally, and are broadly referred to as the Reformed tradition.[301] The oldest Protestant groups separated from the Catholic Church in the Protestant Reformation, often followed by further divisions.[301]

In the 18th century, for example, Methodism grew out of Anglican minister John Wesley's evangelical and revival movement.[302] Several Pentecostal and non-denominational churches, which emphasize the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, in turn grew out of Methodism.[303] Because Methodists, Pentecostals and other evangelicals stress "accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior", [304] which comes from Wesley's emphasis of the New Birth, [305] they often refer to themselves as being born-again.[306][307]

Estimates of the total number of Protestants are very uncertain, but it seems clear that Protestantism is the second largest major group of Christians after Roman Catholicism in number of followers (although the Eastern Orthodox Church is larger than any single Protestant denomination).[294] Often that number is put at more than 800 million, corresponding to nearly 40% of world's Christians.[194] The majority of Protestants are members of just a handful of denominational families, i.e. Adventists, Anglicans, Baptists, Reformed (Calvinists), [308] Lutherans, Methodists and Pentecostals.[194] Nondenominational, evangelical, charismatic, neo-charismatic, independent and other churches are on the rise, and constitute a significant part of Protestant Christianity.[309]

A special grouping are the Anglican churches descended from the Church of England and organized in the Anglican Communion. Some Anglican churches consider themselves both Protestant and Catholic.[310] Some Anglicans consider their church a branch of the "One Holy Catholic Church" alongside of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, a concept rejected by the Roman Catholic Church and some Eastern Orthodox.[311][312]

While Anglicans, Lutherans and the Reformed branches of Protestantism originated in the Magisterial Reformation, other Protestant groups such as the Anabaptists originated in the Radical Reformation and are distinguished by their rejection of infant baptism; they believe in baptism only of adult believers — credobaptism. (Anabaptists are made up mostly of Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites and Schwarzenau Brethren/German Baptist groups.) [313]

Some groups of individuals who hold basic Protestant tenets identify themselves simply as "Christians" or "born-again Christians". They typically distance themselves from the confessionalism and/or creedalism of other Christian communities[314] by calling themselves "non-denominational" or "evangelical". Often founded by individual pastors, they have little affiliation with historic denominations.[315]

Historical chart of the main Protestant branches

Restorationism

Main article: Restorationism

A 19th-century drawing of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery receiving the Aaronic priesthood from John the Baptist. Latter Day Saints believe that the Priesthood ceased to exist after the death of the Apostles and therefore needed to be restored.

The Second Great Awakening, a period of religious revival that occurred in the United States during the early 1800s, saw the development of a number of unrelated churches. They generally saw themselves as restoring the original church of Jesus Christ rather than reforming one of the existing churches.[316] A common belief held by Restorationists was that the other divisions of Christianity had introduced doctrinal defects into Christianity, which was known as the Great Apostasy.[317] In Asia, Iglesia ni Cristo is a known restorationist religion that was established during the early 1900s.

Some of the churches originating during this period are historically connected to early 19th-century camp meetings in the Midwest and Upstate New York. American Millennialism and Adventism, which arose from Evangelical Protestantism, influenced the Jehovah's Witnesses movement and, as a reaction specifically to William Miller, the Seventh-day Adventists. Others, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Christian Church in Canada,[318][319] Churches of Christ, and the Christian churches and churches of Christ, have their roots in the contemporaneous Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, which was centered in Kentucky and Tennessee. Other groups originating in this time period include the Christadelphians and Latter Day Saint movement. While the churches originating in the Second Great Awakening have some superficial similarities, their doctrine and practices vary significantly.

## Other

Various smaller Independent Catholic communities, such as the Old Catholic Church, include the word Catholic in their title, and arguably have more or less liturgical practices in common with the Catholic Church, but are no longer in full communion with Holy See.

Esoteric Christians regard Christianity as a mystery religion,[320][321] and profess the existence and possession of certain esoteric doctrines or practices,[322][323] hidden from the public but accessible only to a narrow circle of "enlightened", "initiated", or highly educated people.[324][325] Some of the esoteric Christian institutions include the Rosicrucian Fellowship, the Anthroposophical Society and the Martinism.

Messianic Judaism (or Messianic Movement) is the name of a Christian movement comprising a number of streams, whose members may consider themselves Jewish. The movement originated in the 1960s and 1970s, and it blends elements of religious Jewish practice with evangelical Christianity. Messianic Judaism affirms Christian creeds such as the messiahship and divinity of "Yeshua" (the Hebrew name of Jesus) and the Triune Nature of God, while also adhering to some Jewish dietary laws and customs.[326]

## Christian culture

Main articles: Christian culture and Role of Christianity in civilization

Further information: Protestant culture, Cultural Christian, and Christian influences in Islam

Set of pictures showcasing Christian culture and famous Christian leaders

Western culture, throughout most of its history, has been nearly equivalent to Christian culture, and a large portion of the population of the Western hemisphere can be described as cultural Christians. The notion of "Europe" and the "Western World" has been intimately connected with the concept of "Christianity and Christendom" many even attribute Christianity for being the link that created a unified European identity.[327]

Though Western culture contained several polytheistic religions during its early years under the Greek and Roman empires, as the centralized Roman power waned, the dominance of the Catholic Church was the only consistent force in Europe.[328] Until the Age of Enlightenment,[329] Christian culture guided the course of philosophy, literature, art, music and science.[328][330] Christian disciplines of the respective arts have subsequently developed into Christian philosophy, Christian art, Christian music, Christian literature etc.

Christianity has had a significant impact on education as the church created the bases of the Western system of education,[331] and was the sponsor of founding universities in the Western world; as the university is generally regarded as an institution that has its origin in the Medieval Christian setting.[159][160] Historically, Christianity has often been a patron of science and medicine. It has been prolific in the foundation of schools, universities and hospitals, and many Catholic clergy;[332] Jesuits in particular,[333][334] have been active in the sciences throughout history and have made significant contributions to the development of science.[335] Protestantism also has had an important influence on science. According to the Merton Thesis, there was a positive correlation between the rise of English Puritanism and German Pietism on the one hand and early experimental science on the other.[336] The Civilizing influence of Christianity includes social welfare,[337] founding hospitals,[338] economics (as the Protestant work ethic),[339][340] politics,[341] architecture,[342] literature,[343] personal hygiene,[344][345] and family life.[346]

Eastern Christians (particularly Nestorian Christians) contributed to the Arab Islamic Civilization during the reign of the Ummayyad and the Abbasid by translating works of Greek philosophers to Syriac and afterwards to Arabic.[347][348][349] They also excelled in philosophy, science, theology and medicine.[350][351][352] And many scholars of the House of Wisdom were of Christian background.[353]

Christians have made a myriad of contributions to human progress in a broad and diverse range of fields,[354] including philosophy,[355] science and technology,[332][356][357][358][359] fine arts and architecture,[360] politics, literatures, music,[361] and business.[362] According to 100 Years of Nobel Prizes a review of Nobel prizes award between 1901 and 2000 reveals that (65.4%) of Nobel Prizes Laureates, have identified Christianity in its various forms as their religious preference.[363]

PostChristianity[364] is the term for the decline of Christianity, particularly in Europe, Canada, Australia and to a minor degree the Southern Cone, in the 20th and 21st centuries, considered in terms of postmodernism. It refers to the loss of Christianity's monopoly on values and world view in historically Christian societies.

Cultural Christians are secular people with a Christian heritage who may not believe in the religious claims of Christianity, but who retain an affinity for the popular culture, art, music and so on related to it. Another frequent application of the term is to distinguish political groups in areas of mixed religious backgrounds.

Ecumenism

Main article: Ecumenism

## Ecumenical worship service at the monastery of Taizé in France

Christian groups and denominations have long expressed ideals of being reconciled, and in the 20th century, Christian ecumenism advanced in two ways.[365] One way was greater cooperation between groups, such as the World Evangelical Alliance founded in 1846 in London or the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of Protestants in 1910, the Justice, Peace and Creation Commission of the World Council of Churches founded in 1948 by Protestant and Orthodox churches, and similar national councils like the National Council of Churches in Australia which includes Roman Catholics.[365]

The other way was institutional union with United and uniting churches, a practice that can be traced back to unions between Lutherans and Calvinists in early 19th-century Germany. Congregationalist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches united in 1925 to form the United Church of Canada,[366] and in 1977 to form the Uniting Church in Australia. The Church of South India was formed in 1947 by the union of Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian churches.[367]

The ecumenical, monastic Taizé Community is notable for being composed of more than one hundred brothers from Protestant and Catholic traditions.[368] The community emphasizes the reconciliation of all denominations and its main church, located in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, France, is named the "Church of Reconciliation".[368] The community is internationally known, attracting over 100,000 young pilgrims annually.[369]

Steps towards reconciliation on a global level were taken in 1965 by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches mutually revoking the excommunications that marked their Great Schism in 1054;[370] the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) working towards full communion between those churches since 1970;[371] and some Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 to address conflicts at the root of the Protestant Reformation. In 2006, the World Methodist Council, representing all Methodist denominations, adopted the declaration.[372]

## Apologetics and criticism

Main articles: Christian apologetics and Criticism of Christianity

A copy of the Summa Theologica, a famous Christian apologetic work

Criticism of Christianity and Christians goes back to the Apostolic Age, with the New Testament recording friction between the followers of Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes (e.g. Matthew 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1–23).[373] In the 2nd century, Christianity was criticized by the Jews on various grounds, e.g. that the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible could not have been fulfilled by Jesus, given that he did not

have a successful life.[374] Additionally a sacrifice to remove sins in advance, for everyone or as a human being, did not fit to the Jewish sacrifice ritual, furthermore God is said to judge people on their deeds instead of their beliefs.[375][376] One of the first comprehensive attacks on Christianity came from the Greek philosopher Celsus, who wrote *The True Word*, a polemic criticizing Christians as being unprofitable members of society.[377]

By the 3rd century, criticism of Christianity had mounted, partly as a defense against it. Wild rumors about Christians were widely circulated, claiming that they were atheists and that, as part of their rituals, they devoured human infants and engaged in incestuous orgies.[378][379] The Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry wrote the fifteen-volume *Adversus Christianos* as a comprehensive attack on Christianity, in part building on the pre-Christian concepts of Plotinus.[380][381]

By the 12th century, the *Mishneh Torah* (i.e., Rabbi Moses Maimonides) was criticizing Christianity on the grounds of idol worship, in that Christians attributed divinity to Jesus who had a physical body.[382] In the 19th century, Nietzsche began to write a series of polemics on the "unnatural" teachings of Christianity (e.g. sexual abstinence), and continued his criticism of Christianity to the end of his life.[383] In the 20th century, the philosopher Bertrand Russell expressed his criticism of Christianity in *Why I Am Not a Christian*, formulating his rejection of Christianity in the setting of logical arguments.[384]

Criticism of Christianity continues to date, e.g. Jewish and Muslim theologians criticize the doctrine of the Trinity held by most Christians, stating that this doctrine in effect assumes that there are three Gods, running against the basic tenet of monotheism.[385] New Testament scholar Robert M. Price has outlined the possibility that some Bible stories are based partly on myth in *"The Christ Myth Theory and its problems"*. [386]

Christian apologetics aims to present a rational basis for Christianity. The word "apologetic" comes from the Greek word "apologeomai", meaning "in defense of". Christian apologetics has taken many forms over the centuries, starting with Paul the Apostle. The philosopher Thomas Aquinas presented five arguments for God's existence in the *Summa Theologica*, while his *Summa contra Gentiles* was a major apologetic work.[387][388] Another famous apologist, G. K. Chesterton, wrote in the early twentieth century about the benefits of religion and, specifically, Christianity. Famous for his use of paradox, Chesterton explained that while Christianity had the most mysteries, it was the most practical religion.[389][390] He pointed to the advance of Christian civilizations as proof of its practicality.[391] The physicist and priest John Polkinghorne, in his *Questions of Truth* discusses the subject of religion and science, a topic that other Christian apologists such as Ravi Zacharias, John Lennox and William Lane Craig have engaged, with the latter two men opining that the inflationary Big Bang model is evidence for the existence of God.[392]