

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

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

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

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



Popular Religion, Folk Religion, Lived Religion

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

The Protestant Reformation

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian Rituals

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

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

Christianity Today

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

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



PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS

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

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

Unit III Islam

The History and Teachings of Islam

Core Teachings

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

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

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



FIGURE 6.12 Indian Muslims praying. Fredrik Renander/Alamy.

like justice; it is both the goal or purpose of human existence, and the means of achieving it. People are called upon to live in accordance with the “true *din*,” the *din* of Abraham and of all prophets. They all lived their lives and made their decisions based upon – in Islamic terminology, “in submission to” – the will of God. The term for “submission [to the will of God]” in Arabic is *islam*. Therefore, the Qur'an says that *islam* is the true *din*. When translated into English, this becomes “Islam is the true religion.” (Qur'an 3:19) However, it is important to understand that, from the perspective of the Qur'an, this does not mean that other religions are false. Rather, it conveys the idea that Islam is the culmination of the monotheistic (or Abrahamic) tradition. The message brought in the 7th century CE by Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, confirmed the messages of earlier messengers, corrected some misinterpretations of those earlier messages, and completed or finalized the transmission of messages from God to humanity.

Muslims refer to their prophet as Prophet Muhammad and, in order to show respect, add the blessing “Peace be upon him” (PBUH or, more correctly, “The peace and blessings of God be upon him,” in Arabic abbreviated as SAW). However, Muhammad is actually considered the last of the prophets of Islam, not the first. Muslims consider Adam to be the first prophet of true Din. The Qur'an mentions Adam 25 times, referring to human beings as the “children of Adam.” Adam is considered a prophet because through him God delivered a message to humanity. Human beings are the creatures of God, created to be stewards, his delegates on the earth. The term used for steward is *khalifah*. (In English this becomes “caliph.” This term is later politicized, as imperial rulers take upon themselves the

