[Template:Pp-semi-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-semi-indef" \o "Template:Pp-semi-indef) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Christianity](/wiki/Template:Christianity)

**Christianity**[[note 1]](#cite_note-1) is an [Abrahamic](/wiki/Abrahamic_religions) [monotheistic](/wiki/Monotheism)[[1]](#cite_note-2) [religion](/wiki/Religion) based on the [life](/wiki/Life_of_Jesus_in_the_New_Testament) and [teachings](/wiki/Oral_gospel_traditions) of [Jesus Christ](/wiki/Jesus) as presented in the [New Testament](/wiki/New_Testament) and [sacred tradition](/wiki/Sacred_tradition).

Christianity is the [world's largest religion](/wiki/Major_religious_groups#Largest_religions),[[2]](#cite_note-3)[[3]](#cite_note-4) with over 2.4 billion adherents,[[4]](#cite_note-5)[[5]](#cite_note-6)[[6]](#cite_note-7)[[note 2]](#cite_note-8) known as [Christians](/wiki/Christian).[[note 3]](#cite_note-9) Christians believe that Jesus is the [Son of God](/wiki/Divine_filiation) and the [savior of humanity](/wiki/Salvation_(Christianity)) whose coming as the [Messiah](/wiki/Messiah) (the [Christ](/wiki/Christ)) was prophesied in the [Old Testament](/wiki/Old_Testament).[[7]](#cite_note-10) [Christian theology](/wiki/Christian_theology) is summarized in [various creeds](/wiki/List_of_Christian_creeds). These [professions](/wiki/Profession_(religious)) of faith state that Jesus [suffered](/wiki/Passion_(Christianity)), [died](/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus), was [buried](/wiki/Burial_of_Jesus), [descended into hell](/wiki/Harrowing_of_Hell), and [rose](/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus) from the dead, in order to grant eternal life to those who believe in him and trust in him for the [remission](/wiki/Forgiveness#Christianity) of their [sins](/wiki/Christian_views_on_sin). The creeds further maintain that Jesus bodily [ascended](/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus) into heaven, where he reigns with [God the Father](/wiki/God_the_Father) in the unity of the [Holy Spirit](/wiki/Holy_Spirit_(Christianity)), and that he will [return](/wiki/Second_Coming) to [judge](/wiki/Last_Judgment) the living and the dead and grant [eternal life](/wiki/Eternal_life_(Christianity)) to his followers. His [Incarnation](/wiki/Incarnation), earthly [ministry](/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus), [Crucifixion](/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus), and Resurrection are often referred to as "[the gospel](/wiki/The_gospel)", meaning "good news".[[note 4]](#cite_note-11) The term [*gospel*](/wiki/Gospel) also refers to written accounts of Jesus's life and teaching, four of which—[Matthew](/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew), [Mark](/wiki/Gospel_of_Mark), [Luke](/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke), and [John](/wiki/Gospel_of_John)—are considered [canonical](/wiki/Biblical_canon) and included in the Christian [Bible](/wiki/Bible).

Christianity began as a [Second Temple Judaic](/wiki/Second_Temple_Judaism) sect in the mid-1st century.[[8]](#cite_note-12)[[9]](#cite_note-13) Originating in [Judea](/wiki/Judea_(Roman_province)), it quickly spread to [Europe](/wiki/Europe), [Syria](/wiki/Syria), [Mesopotamia](/wiki/Mesopotamia), [Asia Minor](/wiki/Asia_Minor), [Egypt](/wiki/Egypt), [Ethiopia](/wiki/Ethiopia), and [India](/wiki/India), and by the end of the 4th century had become the official [state church of the Roman Empire](/wiki/State_church_of_the_Roman_Empire).[[10]](#cite_note-14)[[11]](#cite_note-15)[[12]](#cite_note-16) Following the [Age of Discovery](/wiki/Age_of_Discovery), Christianity spread to the [Americas](/wiki/Americas), [Australasia](/wiki/Australasia), [sub-Saharan Africa](/wiki/Sub-Saharan_Africa), and the rest of the world through [missionary work](/wiki/Christian_mission) and [colonization](/wiki/History_of_colonialism).[[13]](#cite_note-17)[[14]](#cite_note-18)[[15]](#cite_note-19) Christianity has played a prominent role in the shaping of [Western civilization](/wiki/Western_civilization).[[16]](#cite_note-20)[[17]](#cite_note-21)[[18]](#cite_note-22)[[19]](#cite_note-23)[[20]](#cite_note-24) Throughout its history, the religion has weathered [schisms](/wiki/Schism) and theological disputes that have resulted in many distinct churches and [denominations](/wiki/Christian_denomination). Worldwide, the three largest branches of Christianity are the [Roman Catholic Church](/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Church), the [Eastern Orthodox Church](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church), and [Protestantism](/wiki/Protestantism), which is divided into many denominations. The Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches broke [communion](/wiki/Communion_(Christian)) with each other in the [East-West Schism](/wiki/East–West_Schism) of 1054; Protestantism came into existence in the [Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation) of the 16th century, splitting from the Roman Catholic Church.[[21]](#cite_note-25) [Template:TOC limit](/wiki/Template:TOC_limit)

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## Beliefs[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

There are many important differences of interpretation and opinion of the [Bible](/wiki/Bible) and [sacred tradition](/wiki/Sacred_tradition) on which Christianity is based.[[22]](#cite_note-26) Because of these irreconcilable differences in theology and a lack of consensus on the core tenets of Christianity, [Protestants](/wiki/Protestantism), [Catholics](/wiki/Catholic_Church), and [Orthodox](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church) often deny that members of certain other branches are Christians.[[23]](#cite_note-27)

### Creeds[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

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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](/wiki/Christology) controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries to become statements of faith.

Many [evangelical](/wiki/Evangelical) Protestants reject creeds as definitive statements of faith, even while agreeing with some or all of the substance of the creeds. [The Baptists](/wiki/Baptists) have been non-creedal "in that they have not sought to establish binding authoritative confessions of faith on one another."<ref name=Avis>Avis, Paul (2002) *The Christian Church: An Introduction to the Major Traditions*, SPCK, London, ISBN 0-281-05246-8 paperback</ref>[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp) Also rejecting creeds are groups with roots in the [Restoration Movement](/wiki/Restoration_Movement), such as the [Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)](/wiki/Christian_Church_(Disciples_of_Christ)), the [Evangelical Christian Church in Canada](/wiki/Evangelical_Christian_Church_in_Canada), and the [Churches of Christ](/wiki/Churches_of_Christ).[[24]](#cite_note-28)[[25]](#cite_note-29)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)[[26]](#cite_note-30)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)

[thumb|An](/wiki/File:Nicaea_icon.jpg) [Eastern Christian](/wiki/Eastern_Christianity) icon depicting [Emperor Constantine](/wiki/Constantine_I_and_Christianity) and the Fathers of the [First Council of Nicaea](/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea) (325) as holding the Niceno–Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 The [Apostles' Creed](/wiki/Apostles'_Creed) remains the most popular statement of the articles of Christian faith which are generally acceptable to most Christian denominations that are creedal. It is widely used by a number of [Christian denominations](/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations) for both [liturgical](/wiki/Liturgy) and [catechetical](/wiki/Catechesis) purposes, most visibly by liturgical churches of [Western Christian](/wiki/Western_Christian) tradition, including the [Latin Church](/wiki/Latin_Church) of the [Catholic Church](/wiki/Catholic_Church), [Lutheranism](/wiki/Lutheranism), [Anglicanism](/wiki/Anglicanism), and [Western Rite Orthodoxy](/wiki/Western_Rite_Orthodoxy). It is also used by [Presbyterians](/wiki/Presbyterianism), [Methodists](/wiki/Methodism), and [Congregationalists](/wiki/Congregational_church). 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](/wiki/Apostolic_Age). The creed was apparently used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome.[[27]](#cite_note-31) Its main points include:

* belief in [God the Father](/wiki/God_the_Father), [Jesus Christ](/wiki/Jesus_Christ) as the [Son of God](/wiki/Son_of_God) and the [Holy Spirit](/wiki/Holy_Spirit_(Christianity))
* the [death](/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus), [descent into hell](/wiki/Harrowing_of_Hell), [resurrection](/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus), and [ascension](/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus) of Christ
* the holiness of the [Church](/wiki/Ecclesia_(church)) and the [communion of saints](/wiki/Communion_of_saints)
* Christ's [second coming](/wiki/Second_coming), the [Day of Judgement](/wiki/Day_of_Judgement) and [salvation](/wiki/Salvation) of the faithful.

The [Nicene Creed](/wiki/Nicene_Creed), largely a response to [Arianism](/wiki/Arianism), was formulated at the Councils of [Nicaea](/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea) and [Constantinople](/wiki/First_Council_of_Constantinople) in 325 and 381 respectively[[28]](#cite_note-32)[[29]](#cite_note-33) and ratified as the universal creed of [Christendom](/wiki/Christendom) by the [First Council of Ephesus](/wiki/First_Council_of_Ephesus) in 431.[[30]](#cite_note-34) The [Chalcedonian Definition](/wiki/Chalcedonian_Definition), or Creed of Chalcedon, developed at the [Council of Chalcedon](/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon) in 451,[[31]](#cite_note-35) though rejected by the [Oriental Orthodox](/wiki/Oriental_Orthodox) churches,[[32]](#cite_note-36) 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](/wiki/Hypostatic_union).[[33]](#cite_note-37) The [Athanasian Creed](/wiki/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](/wiki/Consubstantiality)."[[34]](#cite_note-38) Most Christians ([Roman Catholic](/wiki/Roman_Catholic), [Eastern Orthodox](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox), [Oriental Orthodox](/wiki/Oriental_Orthodox), and [Protestant](/wiki/Protestant) alike) accept the use of creeds, and subscribe to at least one of the creeds mentioned above.[[35]](#cite_note-39)

### Jesus[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|right|200px|Various](/wiki/File:CompositeJesus.JPG) [depictions of Jesus](/wiki/Depiction_of_Jesus) [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in [Jesus](/wiki/Jesus) as the [Son of God](/wiki/Son_of_God) and the [Messiah](/wiki/Messiah) (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus, as the Messiah, was [anointed](/wiki/Anointing) by God as savior of humanity, and hold that Jesus' coming was the fulfillment of [messianic prophecies](/wiki/Messianic_prophecies_of_Jesus) of the [Old Testament](/wiki/Old_Testament). The Christian concept of the Messiah differs significantly from [the contemporary Jewish concept](/wiki/Jewish_Messiah). The core Christian belief is that through belief in and acceptance of [the death and resurrection of Jesus](/wiki/Death_and_Resurrection_of_Jesus), [sinful](/wiki/Original_sin) humans can be reconciled to God and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of [eternal life](/wiki/Immortality).[[36]](#cite_note-40) While there have been many [theological](/wiki/Christian_theology) disputes over the [nature of Jesus](/wiki/Christology) over the earliest centuries of Christian history, generally Christians believe that Jesus is [God incarnate](/wiki/Incarnation_(Christianity)) and "[true God and true man](/wiki/Hypostatic_union)" (or both fully divine and fully human). Jesus, having become [fully human](/wiki/Incarnation_(Christianity)), suffered the pains and temptations of a mortal man, but did not [sin](/wiki/Christian_views_on_sin). As fully God, he rose to life again. According to the [New Testament](/wiki/New_Testament), he [rose](/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus) from the dead,[[37]](#cite_note-41) [ascended](/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus_Christ) to heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father[[38]](#cite_note-42) and will ultimately [return](/wiki/Second_Coming)[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) to fulfill the rest of [Messianic prophecy](/wiki/Messianic_prophecy), including the [resurrection of the dead](/wiki/Resurrection_of_the_dead), the [Last Judgment](/wiki/Last_Judgment) and final establishment of the [Kingdom of God](/wiki/Kingdom_of_God_(Christianity)).

According to the [canonical](/wiki/Biblical_canon) [gospels](/wiki/Gospel) of [Matthew](/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew) and [Luke](/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke), Jesus was [conceived](/wiki/Incarnation_(Christianity)) by the [Holy Spirit](/wiki/Holy_Spirit_(Christianity)) and [born](/wiki/Nativity_of_Jesus) from [the Virgin Mary](/wiki/Mary,_mother_of_Jesus). Little of Jesus' childhood is recorded in the canonical gospels, although [infancy gospels](/wiki/New_Testament_apocrypha) 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](/wiki/New_Testament), because that part of his life is believed to be most important. The biblical accounts of [Jesus' ministry](/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus) include: [his baptism](/wiki/Baptism_of_Jesus), [miracles](/wiki/Miracles_of_Jesus), preaching, teaching, and deeds.

#### Death and resurrection[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|right|200px|](/wiki/File:Cristo_crucificado.jpg)[*Crucifixion*](/wiki/Christ_Crucified_(Velázquez)), representing the death of [Jesus](/wiki/Jesus) on the [Cross](/wiki/Christian_Cross), painting by [Diego Velázquez](/wiki/Diego_Velázquez), 17th century

Christians consider the resurrection of Jesus to be the cornerstone of their faith (see [1 Corinthians 15](/wiki/1_Corinthians_15)) and the most important event in history.[[39]](#cite_note-43) Among Christian beliefs, the death and resurrection of Jesus are two core events on which much of Christian doctrine and theology is based.[[40]](#cite_note-44) According to the New Testament, Jesus was [crucified](/wiki/Crucifixion), died a physical death, was buried within a tomb, and rose from the dead three days later.[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) [Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) [Template:Bibleref2c-nb](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c-nb)

The New Testament mentions several [resurrection appearances of Jesus](/wiki/Resurrection_appearances_of_Jesus) on different occasions to his [twelve apostles](/wiki/Twelve_apostles) and [disciples](/wiki/Disciple_(Christianity)), including "more than five hundred brethren at once",[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) before Jesus' [Ascension](/wiki/Ascension_of_Jesus_Christ) to heaven. Jesus' death and resurrection are commemorated by Christians in all worship services, with special emphasis during [Holy Week](/wiki/Holy_Week) which includes [Good Friday](/wiki/Good_Friday) and [Easter](/wiki/Easter) Sunday.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are usually considered the most important events in [Christian theology](/wiki/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](/wiki/Eternal_life_(Christianity)).[[41]](#cite_note-45) Christian churches accept and teach the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus with very few exceptions.[[42]](#cite_note-46) 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](/wiki/Historical_Jesus) and the proclamation of the [early church](/wiki/Early_church).[[43]](#cite_note-47) Some [liberal Christians](/wiki/Liberal_Christianity) do not accept a literal bodily resurrection,[[44]](#cite_note-48)[[45]](#cite_note-49) seeing the story as richly symbolic and spiritually nourishing [myth](/wiki/Mythology). Arguments over death and resurrection claims occur at many religious [debates](/wiki/Debate) and [interfaith dialogues](/wiki/Interfaith).[[46]](#cite_note-50) [Paul the Apostle](/wiki/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."[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) [[47]](#cite_note-51)

### Salvation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

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[Paul the Apostle](/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle), like Jews and Roman [pagans](/wiki/Pagan) of his time, believed that sacrifice can bring about new kinship ties, purity, and eternal life.[[48]](#cite_note-52) 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".[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) [[49]](#cite_note-53) 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".[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) [[48]](#cite_note-52) Modern Christian churches tend to be much more concerned with how humanity can be [saved](/wiki/Eternal_salvation) 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](/wiki/Substitutionary_atonement). 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.[[50]](#cite_note-54)[[51]](#cite_note-55) [Martin Luther](/wiki/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](/wiki/Divine_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](/wiki/Total_depravity), but that [sanctifying grace is irresistible](/wiki/Irresistible_grace).[[52]](#cite_note-56) In contrast Catholics, Orthodox Christians and [Arminian](/wiki/Arminianism) Protestants believe that the exercise of [free will](/wiki/Free_will) is necessary to have faith in Jesus.[[53]](#cite_note-57)

### Trinity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|The](/wiki/File:Shield-Trinity-Scutum-Fidei-English.svg) [Trinity](/wiki/Trinity) is the belief that [God](/wiki/God_in_Christianity) is one God in three persons: the [Father](/wiki/God_the_Father), the [Son](/wiki/God_the_Son) ([Jesus](/wiki/Jesus)), and the [Holy Spirit](/wiki/Holy_Spirit_(Christianity)) *Trinity* refers to the teaching that the one God[[1]](#cite_note-2) comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons; the [*Father*](/wiki/God_the_Father), the *Son* (incarnate in Jesus Christ), and the [*Holy Spirit*](/wiki/Holy_Spirit). Together, these three persons are sometimes called the [Godhead](/wiki/Godhead_(Christianity)),[[54]](#cite_note-58)[[55]](#cite_note-59)[[56]](#cite_note-60) although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead.[[57]](#cite_note-61) In the words of the [Athanasian Creed](/wiki/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".[[58]](#cite_note-62) 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.[[59]](#cite_note-63) The [Trinity](/wiki/Trinity) is an essential doctrine of mainstream Christianity. From earlier than the times of the [Nicene Creed](/wiki/Nicene_Creed), 325, Christianity advocated[[60]](#cite_note-64) the triune [mystery](/wiki/Holy_Mystery)-nature of [God](/wiki/God_in_Christianity) as a normative profession of faith. According to [Roger E. Olson](/wiki/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.[[61]](#cite_note-65)[[62]](#cite_note-66) 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](/wiki/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](/wiki/Western_Christian) theology) [from the Son](/wiki/Filioque). Regardless of this apparent difference, the three "persons" are each [eternal](/wiki/Eternity) and [omnipotent](/wiki/Omnipotent). Other Christian religions including [Unitarian Universalism](/wiki/Unitarian_Universalism), [Jehovah's Witnesses](/wiki/Jehovah's_Witnesses), [Mormonism](/wiki/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](/wiki/Theophilus_of_Antioch). He wrote of "the Trinity of God (the Father), His Word (the Son) and His Wisdom (Holy Spirit)".[[63]](#cite_note-67) The term may have been in use before this time. Afterwards it appears in [Tertullian](/wiki/Tertullian).[[64]](#cite_note-68)[[65]](#cite_note-69) In the following century the word was in general use. It is found in many passages of [Origen](/wiki/Origen).[[66]](#cite_note-70)

#### Trinitarians[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

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*Trinitarianism* denotes those Christians who believe in the concept of the [Trinity](/wiki/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 [hritism](/wiki/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](/wiki/Arianism)). Rather, the Trinity is defined as one God in three Persons.[[67]](#cite_note-71)

#### Nontrinitarianism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

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*Nontrinitarianism* (or *antitrinitarianism*) refers to theology that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. Various nontrinitarian views, such as [adoptionism](/wiki/Adoptionism) or [modalism](/wiki/Modalism), existed in early Christianity, leading to the disputes about [Christology](/wiki/Christology).[[68]](#cite_note-72) Nontrinitarianism later appeared again in the [Gnosticism](/wiki/Gnosticism) of the [Cathars](/wiki/Cathars) in the 11th through 13th centuries, among groups with [Unitarian](/wiki/Unitarianism) theology in the [Protestant Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation) of the 16th century,[[69]](#cite_note-73) in the 18th-century [Enlightenment](/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment), and in some groups arising during the [Second Great Awakening](/wiki/Second_Great_Awakening) of the 19th century.

### Scriptures[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [250px|thumb|left|The](/wiki/File:Gutenberg_Bible,_Lenox_Copy,_New_York_Public_Library,_2009._Pic_01.jpg) [Bible](/wiki/Bible) is the sacred book in Christianity. Christianity, like other religions, has adherents whose beliefs and biblical interpretations vary. Christianity regards the [biblical canon](/wiki/Biblical_canon), the [Old Testament](/wiki/Old_Testament) and the [New Testament](/wiki/New_Testament), as the [inspired](/wiki/Biblical_inspiration) 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 [Template:Bibleref2](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2) is *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed".[[70]](#cite_note-74) Some believe that divine inspiration makes our present Bibles [inerrant](/wiki/Biblical_inerrancy). 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](/wiki/King_James_Version).[[71]](#cite_note-75)[[72]](#cite_note-76)[[73]](#cite_note-77) Another closely related view is [Biblical infallibility](/wiki/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](/wiki/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](/wiki/Tradition), and of the [councils](/wiki/Ecumenical_council) that have convened on the subject. Every version of the Old Testament always includes the books of the [Tanakh](/wiki/Tanakh), the canon of the [Hebrew Bible](/wiki/Hebrew_Bible). The Catholic and Orthodox canons, in addition to the Tanakh, also include the [Deuterocanonical Books](/wiki/Deuterocanonical_Books) as part of the Old Testament. These books appear in the [Septuagint](/wiki/Septuagint), but are regarded by Protestants to be [apocryphal](/wiki/Biblical_apocrypha). 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.[[74]](#cite_note-78) The New Testament, originally written in [Koine Greek](/wiki/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](/wiki/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".[[75]](#cite_note-79) 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 12[[76]](#cite_note-80) is thought by many to be a forgery by a follower of Paul, a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 14,[[77]](#cite_note-81) 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.[[75]](#cite_note-79) 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",[[78]](#cite_note-82) 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](/wiki/Gnostic_Gospels) have now been recovered, such as those found near [Nag Hammadi](/wiki/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](/wiki/Gospel_of_Thomas), in particular, may date from as early as AD 50, 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"),[[79]](#cite_note-83) is reminiscent of Luke 17:20–21[[80]](#cite_note-84)[[81]](#cite_note-85)—and the [Gospel of John](/wiki/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](/wiki/Early_Christianity) 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[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[thumb|250px|](/wiki/File:View_of_saint_Peter_basilica_from_a_roof.jpg)[St. Peter's Basilica](/wiki/St._Peter's_Basilica), [Vatican City](/wiki/Vatican_City), the largest church in the world and a symbol of the [Catholic Church](/wiki/Catholic_Church).[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) In antiquity, two schools of exegesis developed in [Alexandria](/wiki/Alexandria) and [Antioch](/wiki/School_of_Antioch). Alexandrine interpretation, exemplified by [Origen](/wiki/Origen), tended to read Scripture [allegorically](/wiki/Allegory), while Antiochene interpretation adhered to the literal sense, holding that other meanings (called [*theoria*](/wiki/Theoria)) could only be accepted if based on the literal meaning.[[82]](#cite_note-86) [Catholic](/wiki/Catholic_Church) theology distinguishes two senses of scripture: the literal and the spiritual.[[83]](#cite_note-87) 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](/wiki/Typology_(theology)). An example would be the [parting of the Red Sea](/wiki/Passage_of_the_Red_Sea) being understood as a "type" (sign) of baptism.[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c)
* the [*moral*](/wiki/Moral) sense, which understands the scripture to contain some ethical teaching.
* the [*anagogical*](/wiki/Anagoge) sense, which applies to [eschatology](/wiki/Eschatology), eternity and the [consummation of the world](/wiki/Apocalypse)

Regarding [exegesis](/wiki/Exegesis), following the rules of sound interpretation, Catholic theology holds:

* the injunction that all other senses of sacred scripture are based on the *literal*[[84]](#cite_note-88)[[85]](#cite_note-89)\* that the historicity of the Gospels must be absolutely and constantly held[[86]](#cite_note-90)\* that scripture must be read within the "living Tradition of the whole Church"[[87]](#cite_note-91) and
* that "the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the [Bishop](/wiki/Bishop) of [Rome](/wiki/Diocese_of_Rome)".[[88]](#cite_note-92)

#### Protestant interpretation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[thumb|230px|right|](/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_by_Cranach-restoration.tif)[Protestants](/wiki/Protestants) believe [Martin Luther's](/wiki/Martin_Luther) basic beliefs against the Catholic Church: [Sola scriptura](/wiki/Sola_scriptura) (by Scripture alone), [Sola fide](/wiki/Sola_fide) (by faith alone), [Sola gratia](/wiki/Sola_gratia) (by grace alone), [Solus Christus](/wiki/Solus_Christus) (through Christ alone), and [Soli Deo gloria](/wiki/Soli_Deo_gloria) (glory to God alone)

##### Clarity of Scripture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is a self-sufficient revelation, the final authority on all Christian doctrine, and [revealed all truth](/wiki/Revelation) necessary for salvation. This concept is known as [*sola scriptura*](/wiki/Sola_scriptura).[[89]](#cite_note-93) 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".[[90]](#cite_note-94) He advocated "one definite and simple understanding of Scripture".[[90]](#cite_note-94) [John Calvin](/wiki/John_Calvin) wrote, "all who refuse not to follow the Holy Spirit as their guide, find in the Scripture a clear light."[[91]](#cite_note-95) The Second [Helvetic](/wiki/Helvetic_Republic) Confession, composed by the pastor of the Reformed church in Zürich (successor to Protestant reformer [Zwingli](/wiki/Zwingli)) was adopted as a declaration of doctrine by most European Reformed churches.[[92]](#cite_note-96)

##### Original intended meaning of Scripture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

Protestants stress the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture, the [historical-grammatical method](/wiki/Historical-grammatical_method).[[93]](#cite_note-97) The historical-grammatical method or grammatico-historical method is an effort in [Biblical hermeneutics](/wiki/Biblical_hermeneutics) to find the intended original meaning in the text.[[94]](#cite_note-98) 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.[[95]](#cite_note-99) 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."[[96]](#cite_note-100) 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.[[94]](#cite_note-98)

Some Protestant interpreters make use of typology.[[97]](#cite_note-101)

### Eschatology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|250px|The 7th-century](/wiki/File:Kohrvirab.jpg) [Khor Virap](/wiki/Khor_Virap) monastery in the shadow of [Mount Ararat](/wiki/Mount_Ararat). [Armenia](/wiki/Armenia) was the first state to adopt Christianity as the state religion, in AD 301.[[98]](#cite_note-102)

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](/wiki/Great_Tribulation), death and the afterlife, the [Rapture](/wiki/Rapture), the [Second Coming](/wiki/Second_Coming) of Jesus, [Resurrection of the Dead](/wiki/Resurrection_of_the_Dead), Heaven and Hell, [Millennialism](/wiki/Millennialism), the [Last Judgment](/wiki/Last_Judgment), the end of the world, and the [New Heavens and New Earth](/wiki/New_Heavens_and_New_Earth).

Christians believe that the second coming of Christ will occur at the [end of time](/wiki/Eschatology) after a period of severe persecution (the Great Tribulation). All who have died will be [resurrected bodily from the dead](/wiki/Resurrection_of_the_dead) for the Last Judgment. Jesus will fully establish the [Kingdom of God](/wiki/Kingdom_of_God) in fulfillment of [scriptural prophecies](/wiki/Bible_prophecy).[[99]](#cite_note-103)[[100]](#cite_note-104)

#### Death and afterlife[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

Most Christians believe that human beings experience divine judgment and are rewarded either with eternal life or [eternal damnation](/wiki/Hell). This includes the [general judgement](/wiki/Last_Judgment) at the [resurrection of the dead](/wiki/Resurrection_of_the_dead) as well as the belief (held by Roman Catholics,[[101]](#cite_note-105)[[102]](#cite_note-106) Orthodox[[103]](#cite_note-107)[[104]](#cite_note-108) and most Protestants) in a [judgment particular to the individual soul](/wiki/Particular_judgment) 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](/wiki/Purgatory) to achieve the holiness necessary for entrance into God's presence.[[105]](#cite_note-109) Those who have attained this goal are called *saints* (Latin *sanctus*, "holy").[[106]](#cite_note-110) Some Christian groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists, hold to [mortalism](/wiki/Christian_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](/wiki/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.[[107]](#cite_note-111)

## Worship[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [230px|thumb|Samples of](/wiki/File:Thebible33.jpg) [Catholic](/wiki/Catholic) religious objects—the [Bible](/wiki/Bible), a [crucifix](/wiki/Crucifix), and a [rosary](/wiki/Rosary)

[Justin Martyr](/wiki/Justin_Martyr) described 2nd-century Christian [liturgy](/wiki/Liturgy) in his [*First Apology*](/wiki/First_Apology) (c. 150) to Emperor [Antoninus Pius](/wiki/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](/wiki/Presbyter) 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](/wiki/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.[[108]](#cite_note-112)

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](/wiki/Annual_cycle), using a book called a [lectionary](/wiki/Lectionary). Instruction is given based on these readings, called a [sermon](/wiki/Sermon), or homily. There are a variety of congregational [prayers](/wiki/Prayer), 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](/wiki/Lord's_Prayer), or Our Father, is regularly prayed.

[thumb|250px|A modern Protestant worship band leading a contemporary worship session](/wiki/File:Worship-team.jpg) Some groups depart from this traditional liturgical structure. A division is often made between "[High](/wiki/High_church)" [church services](/wiki/Church_service), characterized by greater solemnity and ritual, and "[Low](/wiki/Low_church)" services, but even within these two categories there is great diversity in forms of worship. [Seventh-day Adventists](/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_Church) meet on Saturday, while others do not meet on a weekly basis. [Charismatic](/wiki/Charismatic_movement) or [Pentecostal](/wiki/Pentecostal) congregations may spontaneously feel led by the Holy Spirit to action rather than follow a formal order of service, including spontaneous prayer. [Quakers](/wiki/Society_of_Friends) sit quietly until moved by the Holy Spirit to speak.

Some [evangelical](/wiki/Evangelicalism) services resemble concerts with [rock and pop music](/wiki/Christian_rock), 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](/wiki/Minister_of_religion), [preacher](/wiki/Preacher), or [pastor](/wiki/Pastor). Still others may lack any formal leaders, either in principle or by local necessity. Some churches use only [a cappella](/wiki/A_cappella) music, either on principle (for example, many [Churches of Christ](/wiki/Churches_of_Christ) object to the use of instruments in worship) or by tradition (as in Orthodoxy).

Nearly all forms of [churchmanship](/wiki/Churchmanship) celebrate the [Eucharist](/wiki/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](/wiki/Sacramental_bread), saying, "This is my body", and gave them [wine](/wiki/Sacramental_wine) saying, "This is my blood".[[109]](#cite_note-113) Some [Christian denominations](/wiki/Christian_denominations) practice [closed communion](/wiki/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](/wiki/Mortal_sin). Most other churches practice [open communion](/wiki/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](/wiki/Baptism) or weddings in the service or significant [feast days](/wiki/Calendar_of_saints). In the [early church](/wiki/Early_Christianity), 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](/wiki/Sunday_school) or [Sabbath school](/wiki/Sabbath_school) (Sunday schools are often held before rather than during services).

### Sacraments[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

[Template:Quote box](/wiki/Template:Quote_box) In Christian belief and practice, a *sacrament* is a [rite](/wiki/Rite), instituted by Christ, that confers [grace](/wiki/Divine_grace), constituting a [sacred mystery](/wiki/Sacred_Mysteries). The term is derived from the [Latin](/wiki/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.[[110]](#cite_note-114) 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](/wiki/Baptism) and the [Eucharist](/wiki/Eucharist) (or Holy Communion), however, the majority of Christians also recognize five additional sacraments: [Confirmation](/wiki/Confirmation_(Christian_sacrament)) ([Chrismation](/wiki/Chrismation) in the Orthodox tradition), [Holy orders](/wiki/Holy_orders) ([ordination](/wiki/Ordination)), [Penance](/wiki/Penance) (or [Confession](/wiki/Confession_(religion))), [Anointing of the Sick](/wiki/Anointing_of_the_Sick), and [Matrimony](/wiki/Matrimony) (see [Christian views on marriage](/wiki/Christian_views_on_marriage)).[[110]](#cite_note-114) Taken together, these are the [Seven Sacraments](/wiki/Sacraments_of_the_Catholic_Church) as recognized by churches in the [High Church](/wiki/High_Church) tradition—notably [Roman Catholic](/wiki/Sacraments_of_the_Catholic_Church), [Eastern Orthodox](/wiki/Orthodox_Church), [Oriental Orthodox](/wiki/Oriental_Orthodox), [Independent Catholic](/wiki/Independent_Catholic_Churches), [Old Catholic](/wiki/Old_Catholic), many [Anglicans](/wiki/Anglican_sacraments), and some [Lutherans](/wiki/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.[[110]](#cite_note-114) [Christian denominations](/wiki/Christian_denominations), such as [Baptists](/wiki/Baptists), which believe these rites do not communicate grace, prefer to call Baptism and Holy Communion [*ordinances*](/wiki/Ordinance_(Christian)) rather than sacraments.

<gallery widths="200px" heights="150px" > File:Methodistcommunion3.jpg|A [Methodist](/wiki/Methodism) minister celebrating the [Eucharist](/wiki/Eucharist) File:Skondals kyrka 2005.jpg|[Baptism](/wiki/Baptism), specifically [infant baptism](/wiki/Infant_baptism), in the [Lutheran](/wiki/Lutheran) tradition File:Cheirotonia\_Presbyter\_1.jpeg|[Ordination](/wiki/Ordination) of a priest in the Eastern Orthodox tradition </gallery>

### Liturgical calendar[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|left|A](/wiki/File:Nativity_tree2011.jpg) [depiction of the Nativity](/wiki/Nativity_scene) with a [Christmas tree](/wiki/Christmas_tree) backdrop. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Eastern Christians, and traditional Protestant communities frame worship around the [liturgical year](/wiki/Liturgical_year). The liturgical cycle divides the year into a series of [seasons](/wiki/Season), each with their theological emphases, and modes of prayer, which can be signified by different ways of decorating churches, colours of [paraments](/wiki/Parament) and [vestments](/wiki/Vestment) for clergy,[[111]](#cite_note-115) 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](/wiki/Roman_Rite) of the Catholic Church,[[111]](#cite_note-115) and Eastern Christians use analogous calendars based on the cycle of their respective [rites](/wiki/Rite#Christian). Calendars set aside holy days, such as [solemnities](/wiki/Solemnity) which commemorate an event in the life of Jesus or Mary, the [saints](/wiki/Saint), periods of [fasting](/wiki/Fasting) such as [Lent](/wiki/Lent), and other pious events such as [memoria](/wiki/Memoria) or lesser festivals commemorating saints. Christian groups that do not follow a liturgical tradition often retain certain celebrations, such as [Christmas](/wiki/Christmas), [Easter](/wiki/Easter) and [Pentecost](/wiki/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.[[112]](#cite_note-116)

### Symbols[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|right|250px|The](/wiki/File:Nideggen-St.Johannes_Baptist249.JPG) [cross](/wiki/Christian_cross) and the fish are two common symbols of [Jesus Christ](/wiki/Jesus_Christ). The letters of the Greek word ΙΧΘΥΣ [Ichthys](/wiki/Ichthys) (fish) form an acronym for "Ίησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ", which translates into English as "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior". Christianity has not generally practiced [aniconism](/wiki/Aniconism_in_Christianity), or the avoidance or prohibition of types of images, even if the early [Jewish Christians](/wiki/Jewish_Christian) sects, as well as some modern [denominations](/wiki/Christian_denomination), preferred to some extent not to use figures in their symbols, by invoking the [Decalogue's](/wiki/Ten_Commandments) prohibition of [idolatry](/wiki/Idolatry).

The [cross](/wiki/Christian_cross), which is today one of the most widely recognized symbols in the world, was used as a Christian symbol from the earliest times.[[113]](#cite_note-117)[[114]](#cite_note-118) 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.[[115]](#cite_note-119) Although the cross was known to the early Christians, the [crucifix](/wiki/Crucifix) did not appear in use until the 5th century.[[116]](#cite_note-120) Among the symbols employed by the primitive Christians, that of the fish or [Ichthys](/wiki/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.[[117]](#cite_note-121) 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* (Ίησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ), meaning, *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*.[[117]](#cite_note-121) Other major Christian symbols include the [chi-rho monogram](/wiki/Chi-Rho), the [dove](/wiki/Dove) (symbolic of the Holy Spirit), the sacrificial lamb (symbolic of Christ's sacrifice), the [vine](/wiki/Vine) (symbolizing the necessary connectedness of the Christian with Christ) and many others. These all derive from writings found in the New Testament.[[116]](#cite_note-120)

### Baptism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Baptism-of-Christ-xx-Francesco-Alban.JPG)[Francesco Albani's](/wiki/Francesco_Albani) *The Baptism of Christ* [Template:Main articleBaptism](/wiki/Template:Main_article) is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which a person is admitted to membership of the [Church](/wiki/Christian_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](/wiki/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*](/wiki/Immersion_baptism); if immersion is total, by *submersion*; by [affusion](/wiki/Affusion) (pouring); and by [aspersion](/wiki/Aspersion) (sprinkling). Those who hold the first view may also adhere to the tradition of [infant baptism](/wiki/Infant_baptism);[[118]](#cite_note-122) the [Orthodox Churches](/wiki/Orthodox_Church) 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.[[119]](#cite_note-123)[[120]](#cite_note-124) The Catholic Church also practices infant baptism,[[121]](#cite_note-125) usually by affusion, and utilizing the [Trinitarian formula](/wiki/Trinitarian_formula).[[122]](#cite_note-126)

### Prayer[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Jesus' teaching on prayer in the [Sermon on the Mount](/wiki/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.[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) Elsewhere in the New Testament this same freedom of access to God is also emphasized.[Template:Bibleref2cTemplate:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) 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.[[123]](#cite_note-127) In subsequent Christian traditions, certain physical gestures are emphasized, including medieval gestures such as [genuflection](/wiki/Genuflection) or making the [sign of the cross](/wiki/Sign_of_the_cross). [Kneeling](/wiki/Kneeling), bowing and [prostrations](/wiki/Prostration) (see also [poklon](/wiki/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](/wiki/Commendation_ceremony). At other times the older [orans](/wiki/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](/wiki/Apostle_Peter) on behalf of sick persons[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) and by [prophets](/wiki/Prophet) of the Old Testament in favor of other people.[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) In the [Epistle of James](/wiki/Epistle_of_James), no distinction is made between the intercessory prayer offered by ordinary believers and the prominent Old Testament prophet [Elijah](/wiki/Elijah).[Template:Bibleref2c](/wiki/Template:Bibleref2c) The effectiveness of prayer in Christianity derives from the power of God rather than the status of the one praying.[[123]](#cite_note-127) The ancient church, in both [Eastern Christianity](/wiki/Eastern_Christianity) and [Western Christianity](/wiki/Western_Christianity), developed a tradition of asking for the [intercession of (deceased) saints](/wiki/Intercession_of_saints), and this remains the practice of most [Eastern Orthodox](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox), [Oriental Orthodox](/wiki/Oriental_Orthodox), [Roman Catholic](/wiki/Roman_Catholic), and some [Anglican](/wiki/Anglican) churches. Churches of the [Protestant Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation), however, rejected prayer to the saints, largely on the basis of the sole mediatorship of Christ.[[124]](#cite_note-128) The reformer [Huldrych Zwingli](/wiki/Huldrych_Zwingli) admitted that he had offered prayers to the saints until his reading of the Bible convinced him that this was [idolatrous](/wiki/Idolatry_in_Christianity).[[125]](#cite_note-129) According to the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](/wiki/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."[[126]](#cite_note-130) The [Book of Common Prayer](/wiki/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[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

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### Early Church and Christological Councils[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[thumb|230px|right|](/wiki/File:Inside_of_Saint_Ananias.jpg)[Chapel of Saint Ananias](/wiki/House_of_Saint_Ananias), [Damascus](/wiki/Damascus), [Syria](/wiki/Syria), an early example of a Christian house of worship; built in the 1st century AD [thumb|230px|right|An early circular](/wiki/File:Ephesus_IchthysCrop.jpg) [ichthys](/wiki/Ichthys) symbol, created by combining the Greek letters [ΙΧΘΥΣ](/wiki/ΙΧΘΥΣ) into a wheel. [Ephesus](/wiki/Ephesus), Asia Minor. [thumb|right|230px|](/wiki/File:Kadisha_Valley_cross.jpg)[Kadisha Valley](/wiki/Kadisha_Valley), [Lebanon](/wiki/Lebanon), home to some of the earliest Christian monasteries in the world. [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

Christianity began as a [Jewish](/wiki/Jewish) sect in the [Levant](/wiki/Levant) of the middle east in the mid-1st century. Other than [Second Temple Judaism](/wiki/Second_Temple_Judaism), the primary religious influences of early Christianity are [Zoroastrianism](/wiki/Zoroastrianism) and [Gnosticism](/wiki/Gnosticism).[[note 3]](#cite_note-9)[[8]](#cite_note-12)[[9]](#cite_note-13)[[127]](#cite_note-131) Prior to the establishment of universities, European higher education took place for hundreds of years in Christian [cathedral schools](/wiki/Cathedral_school) or [monastic schools](/wiki/Monastic_school) (*Scholae monasticae*), in which [monks](/wiki/Monk) and [nuns](/wiki/Nun) taught classes; evidence of these immediate forerunners of the later university at many places dates back to the 6th century AD.[[151]](#cite_note-155) Accompanying the rise of the "new towns" throughout Europe, [mendicant orders](/wiki/Mendicant_order) were founded, bringing the [consecrated religious life](/wiki/Consecrated_life_(Catholic_Church)) out of the monastery and into the new urban setting. The two principal mendicant movements were the [Franciscans](/wiki/Franciscans)[[152]](#cite_note-156) and the [Dominicans](/wiki/Dominican_Order)[[153]](#cite_note-157) founded by [St. Francis](/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi) and [St. Dominic](/wiki/St._Dominic) respectively. Both orders made significant contributions to the development of the great universities of Europe. Another new order were the [Cistercians](/wiki/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](/wiki/Romanesque_architecture) and [Gothic architecture](/wiki/Gothic_architecture) and the building of the great European cathedrals.[[154]](#cite_note-158) From 1095 under the pontificate of [Urban II](/wiki/Urban_II), the [Crusades](/wiki/Crusades) were launched.[[155]](#cite_note-159) These were a series of military campaigns in the [Holy Land](/wiki/Holy_Land) and elsewhere, initiated in response to pleas from the Byzantine Emperor [Alexios I](/wiki/Alexios_I) for aid against [Turkish](/wiki/Turkish_people) expansion. The Crusades ultimately failed to stifle Islamic aggression and even contributed to Christian enmity with the sacking of [Constantinople](/wiki/Constantinople) during the [Fourth Crusade](/wiki/Fourth_Crusade).[[156]](#cite_note-160) Over a period stretching from the 7th to the 13th century, the Christian Church underwent gradual alienation, resulting in a [schism](/wiki/East-West_Schism) dividing it into a so-called Latin or [Western Christian](/wiki/Western_Christian) branch, the Roman Catholic Church,[[157]](#cite_note-161) and an [Eastern](/wiki/Eastern_Christianity), largely Greek, branch, the [Orthodox Church](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church). These two churches disagree on a number of administrative, liturgical, and doctrinal issues, most notably [papal primacy of jurisdiction](/wiki/Papal_primacy).[[158]](#cite_note-162)[[159]](#cite_note-163) The [Second Council of Lyon](/wiki/Second_Council_of_Lyon) (1274) and the [Council of Florence](/wiki/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](/wiki/Eastern_Catholic_Churches).

Beginning around 1184, following the crusade against the [Cathar](/wiki/Cathars) heresy,[[160]](#cite_note-164) various institutions, broadly referred to as the [Inquisition](/wiki/Inquisition), were established with the aim of suppressing [heresy](/wiki/Heresy) and securing religious and doctrinal unity within Christianity through [conversion](/wiki/Religious_conversion) and prosecution.[[161]](#cite_note-165)

### Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

[thumb|250px|](/wiki/File:95Thesen.jpg)[Martin Luther](/wiki/Martin_Luther) started the [Protestant Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation) in 1517 with the [Ninety-Five Theses](/wiki/The_Ninety-Five_Theses), going against the Catholic Church interpretation of the Bible [Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

The 15th-century [Renaissance](/wiki/Renaissance) brought about a renewed interest in ancient and classical learning. Another major schism, the [Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation), resulted in the splintering of the [Western Christendom](/wiki/Western_Christianity) into several branches.[[162]](#cite_note-166) [Martin Luther](/wiki/Martin_Luther) in 1517 [protested](/wiki/95_Theses) against the sale of [indulgences](/wiki/Indulgences) and soon moved on to deny several key points of Roman Catholic [doctrine](/wiki/Doctrine).[[163]](#cite_note-167) Other reformers like [Zwingli](/wiki/Huldrych_Zwingli), [Calvin](/wiki/John_Calvin), [Knox](/wiki/John_Knox) and [Arminius](/wiki/Jacobus_Arminius) further criticized Roman Catholic teaching and worship. These challenges developed into the movement called [Protestantism](/wiki/Protestantism), which repudiated the [primacy of the pope](/wiki/Papal_primacy), the role of tradition, the [seven sacraments](/wiki/Catholic_sacraments), and other doctrines and practices.[[163]](#cite_note-167) The [Reformation in England](/wiki/English_Reformation) began in 1534, when [King Henry VIII](/wiki/Henry_VIII_of_England) had himself [declared head](/wiki/Act_of_Supremacy) of the [Church of England](/wiki/Church_of_England). Beginning in 1536, the monasteries throughout England, Wales and Ireland were [dissolved](/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_monasteries).[[164]](#cite_note-168) [Thomas Müntzer](/wiki/Thomas_Müntzer), [Andreas Karlstadt](/wiki/Andreas_Karlstadt) and other theologians perceived both the Roman Catholic Church and the confessions of the [Magisterial Reformation](/wiki/Magisterial_Reformation) as corrupted. Their activity brought about the [Radical Reformation](/wiki/Radical_Reformation), which gave birth to various [Anabaptist](/wiki/Anabaptist) denominations.

[thumb|230px|Michelangelo's *Pietà* in](/wiki/File:Michelangelo's_Pieta_5450_cropncleaned_edit.jpg) [St. Peter's Basilica](/wiki/St._Peter's_Basilica), The Catholic Church were among the patronage of the [Renaissance](/wiki/Renaissance)[[165]](#cite_note-169)[[166]](#cite_note-170)[[167]](#cite_note-171) 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](/wiki/Counter-Reformation) or Catholic Reform.[[168]](#cite_note-172) The [Council of Trent](/wiki/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.[[169]](#cite_note-173) Meanwhile, the discovery of America by [Christopher Columbus](/wiki/Christopher_Columbus) in 1492 brought about a new wave of missionary activity. Partly from missionary zeal, but under the impetus of [colonial expansion](/wiki/Colonialism) by the European powers, Christianity spread to the Americas, Oceania, [East Asia](/wiki/East_Asia), and [sub-Saharan Africa](/wiki/Sub-Saharan_Africa).

Throughout Europe, the divides caused by the Reformation led to outbreaks of [religious violence](/wiki/Religious_violence) and the establishment of separate state churches in Europe. [Lutheranism](/wiki/Lutheranism) spread into northern, central and eastern parts of present-day Germany, [Livonia](/wiki/Livonia) and Scandinavia. [Anglicanism](/wiki/Anglicanism) was established in England in 1534. [Calvinism](/wiki/Calvinism) and its varieties (such as [Presbyterianism](/wiki/Presbyterianism)) were introduced in [Scotland](/wiki/Scotland), the [Netherlands](/wiki/Netherlands), [Hungary](/wiki/Hungary), [Switzerland](/wiki/Switzerland) and [France](/wiki/France). [Arminianism](/wiki/Arminianism) gained followers in the Netherlands and [Frisia](/wiki/Frisia). Ultimately, these differences led to the outbreak of [conflicts](/wiki/Religious_war) in which religion played a key factor. The [Thirty Years' War](/wiki/Thirty_Years'_War), the [English Civil War](/wiki/English_Civil_War), and the [French Wars of Religion](/wiki/French_Wars_of_Religion) are prominent examples. These events intensified the [Christian debate on persecution and toleration](/wiki/Christian_debate_on_persecution_and_toleration).[[170]](#cite_note-174)

### Post-Enlightenment[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

[thumb|230px|right|A depiction of](/wiki/File:Madonna_and_Child,_Kakure_Kirishitan.jpg) [Madonna and Child](/wiki/Madonna_and_Child) in a 19th-century [Kakure Kirishitan](/wiki/Kakure_Kirishitan) [Japanese woodcut](/wiki/Ukiyo-e).

In the era known as the [Great Divergence](/wiki/Great_Divergence), when in the West the [Age of Enlightenment](/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment) and the [Scientific revolution](/wiki/Scientific_revolution) brought about great societal changes, Christianity was confronted with various forms of [skepticism](/wiki/Skepticism) and with certain modern [political ideologies](/wiki/Ideology) such as versions of [socialism](/wiki/Socialism) and [liberalism](/wiki/Liberalism).[[171]](#cite_note-175) Events ranged from mere [anti-clericalism](/wiki/Anti-clericalism) to violent outbursts against Christianity such as the [Dechristianisation](/wiki/Dechristianisation_of_France_during_the_French_Revolution) during the [French Revolution](/wiki/French_Revolution),[[172]](#cite_note-176) the [Spanish Civil War](/wiki/Spanish_Civil_War), and general hostility of [Marxist](/wiki/Marxism) movements, especially [the Russian Revolution](/wiki/Russian_Revolution_(1917)).

Especially pressing in Europe was the formation of [nation states](/wiki/Nation_states) after the [Napoleonic era](/wiki/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](/wiki/University_of_Fribourg), looking specifically at Catholicisms in Europe, identifies four models for the European nations. In traditionally Catholic countries such as [Belgium](/wiki/Belgium), [Spain](/wiki/Spain), and to some extent [Austria](/wiki/Austria), religious and national communities are more or less identical. Cultural symbiosis and separation are found in [Poland](/wiki/Poland), [Ireland](/wiki/Ireland), and [Switzerland](/wiki/Switzerland), all countries with competing denominations. Competition is found in [Germany](/wiki/Germany), the [Netherlands](/wiki/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](/wiki/Italy), countries where the state actively opposed itself to the authority of the Catholic Church.[[173]](#cite_note-177) The combined factors of the formation of nation states and [ultramontanism](/wiki/Ultramontanism), especially in Germany and the Netherlands but also in [England](/wiki/England) (to a much lesser extent[[174]](#cite_note-178)), 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](/wiki/First_Vatican_Council), and in Germany would lead directly to the [Kulturkampf](/wiki/Kulturkampf), where liberals and Protestants under the leadership of [Bismarck](/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck) managed to severely restrict Catholic expression and organization.

Christian commitment in Europe dropped as modernity and secularism came into their own in Europe,[[175]](#cite_note-179) particularly in the [Czech Republic](/wiki/Czech_Republic) and [Estonia](/wiki/Estonia),[[176]](#cite_note-180) 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](/wiki/Western_civilization) no longer the chief standard bearer of Christianity.

Some Europeans (including diaspora), [Indigenous peoples of the Americas](/wiki/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](/wiki/Arabs) are [Christians](/wiki/Arab_Christians_and_Arabic-speaking_Christians),<ref name=Pacini>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> most prevalent in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

## Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [Template:Bar box](/wiki/Template:Bar_box) [thumb|270px|right|The global distribution of Christians: Countries colored a darker shade have a higher proportion of Christians.](/wiki/File:Christianity_percent_population_in_each_nation_World_Map_Christian_data_by_Pew_Research.svg)[[177]](#cite_note-181) With around 2.4 billion adherents,[[4]](#cite_note-5)[[5]](#cite_note-6) split into three main branches of Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox, Christianity is the [world's largest religion](/wiki/Major_religious_groups).[[3]](#cite_note-4) 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.[[178]](#cite_note-182) According to a 2015 [Pew Research Center](/wiki/Pew_Research_Center) study, by 2050, the Christian population is expected to exceed 3 billion.<ref name=PewProjections>[The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/03/PF_15.04.02_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf)</ref>[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp) As a percentage of Christians, popular Protestantism is one of the fastest growing religious categories in the world.[[179]](#cite_note-183)[[180]](#cite_note-184) Christianity is the predominant religion in Europe, the [Americas](/wiki/Americas) and [Southern Africa](/wiki/Southern_Africa). In Asia, it is the dominant religion in [Georgia](/wiki/Georgia_(country)), [Armenia](/wiki/Armenia), [East Timor](/wiki/East_Timor) and the [Philippines](/wiki/Philippines).[[181]](#cite_note-185) However, it is declining in many areas including the [Northern](/wiki/Northern_United_States) and [Western United States](/wiki/Western_United_States),[[182]](#cite_note-186) Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), northern Europe (including Great Britain,[[183]](#cite_note-187) Scandinavia and other places), France, Germany, the Canadian provinces of [Ontario](/wiki/Ontario), [British Columbia](/wiki/British_Columbia), and [Quebec](/wiki/Quebec), and parts of Asia (especially the Middle East – due to the [Christian emigration](/wiki/Christian_emigration),[[184]](#cite_note-188)[[185]](#cite_note-189)[[186]](#cite_note-190) [South Korea](/wiki/Christianity_in_South_Korea),[[187]](#cite_note-191) [Taiwan](/wiki/Taiwan),[[188]](#cite_note-192) and [Macau](/wiki/Macau)[[189]](#cite_note-193)).

The Christian population is not decreasing in Brazil, the [Southern United States](/wiki/Southern_United_States)<ref name=ARIS2008>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> and the province of [Alberta](/wiki/Alberta), Canada,[[190]](#cite_note-194) but the percentage is decreasing. In countries such as Australia[[191]](#cite_note-195) and New Zealand,[[192]](#cite_note-196) the Christian population are declining in both numbers and percentage.

Despite the declining numbers, Christianity remains the dominant religion in the [Western World](/wiki/Western_World), where 70% are Christians.[[6]](#cite_note-7) A 2011 [Pew Research Center](/wiki/Pew_Research_Center) survey found that 76.2% of [Europeans](/wiki/Europe), 73.3% in [Oceania](/wiki/Oceania), and about 86.0% in the [Americas](/wiki/Americas) (90.0% in [Latin America](/wiki/Latin_America) and 77.4% in [North America](/wiki/North_America)) described themselves as Christians.[[6]](#cite_note-7)[[193]](#cite_note-197)[[194]](#cite_note-198)[[195]](#cite_note-199) By 2010 about 157 countries and territories in the world had Christian majorities.[[3]](#cite_note-4) However, there are many [charismatic movements](/wiki/Charismatic_movements) that have become well established over large parts of the world, especially Africa, Latin America and Asia.[[196]](#cite_note-200)[[197]](#cite_note-201)[[198]](#cite_note-202)<ref name=britannica>[Template:Cite encyclopedia](/wiki/Template:Cite_encyclopedia)</ref><ref name=CTReview>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> Since 1900, due primarily to conversion, Protestantism has spread rapidly in Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America.[[199]](#cite_note-203) A leading Saudi Arabian [Muslim](/wiki/Muslim) leader Sheikh Ahmad al Qatanni reported on [Al Jazeera](/wiki/Al_Jazeera) that every day 16,000 African Muslims convert to Christianity. He claimed that [Islam](/wiki/Islam) was losing 6 million African Muslims a year to becoming Christians,[[200]](#cite_note-204)[[201]](#cite_note-205)[[202]](#cite_note-206)[[203]](#cite_note-207)[[204]](#cite_note-208) St. Mary's University study estimated about 10.2 million [Muslim](/wiki/Muslim) [convert to Christianity](/wiki/Convert_to_Christianity) in 2015.[[205]](#cite_note-209) as well a significant numbers of Muslims converts to Christianity in Afghanistan,[[206]](#cite_note-210) Albania,[[205]](#cite_note-209) Azerbaijan[[207]](#cite_note-211)[[208]](#cite_note-212) Algeria,[[209]](#cite_note-213)[[210]](#cite_note-214) Belgium,[[211]](#cite_note-215) France,[[210]](#cite_note-214) Germany,[[212]](#cite_note-216) Iran,[[213]](#cite_note-217) India,[[210]](#cite_note-214) Indonesia,[[214]](#cite_note-218) Malaysia,[[215]](#cite_note-219) Morocco,[[210]](#cite_note-214)[[216]](#cite_note-220) Russia,[[210]](#cite_note-214) Tunisia,[[205]](#cite_note-209) Turkey,[[210]](#cite_note-214)[[217]](#cite_note-221)[[218]](#cite_note-222)[[219]](#cite_note-223) Kazakhstan,[[220]](#cite_note-224) Kyrgyzstan,[[205]](#cite_note-209) Kosovo,[[221]](#cite_note-225) and Central Asia.[[222]](#cite_note-226)[[223]](#cite_note-227) It is also reported that Christianity is popular among people of different backgrounds in India (mostly Hindus),[[224]](#cite_note-228)[[225]](#cite_note-229) and Malaysia,[[226]](#cite_note-230) Mongolia,[[227]](#cite_note-231) Nigeria,[[228]](#cite_note-232) Vietnam,[[229]](#cite_note-233) Singapore,[[230]](#cite_note-234) Indonesia,[[231]](#cite_note-235)[[232]](#cite_note-236) China,[[233]](#cite_note-237) Japan, and South Korea.[[234]](#cite_note-238) In most countries in the developed world, [church attendance](/wiki/Church_attendance) among people who continue to identify themselves as Christians has been falling over the last few decades.[[235]](#cite_note-239) Some sources view this simply as part of a drift away from traditional membership institutions,[[236]](#cite_note-240) while others link it to signs of a decline in belief in the importance of religion in general.[[237]](#cite_note-241) According to data from the European Social Survey in 2012 show that around a third of [European Christians](/wiki/Christianity_in_Europe) say they attend services once a month or more,[[238]](#cite_note-242) Conversely about more than two-thirds of Latin American Christians and according to the [World Values Survey](/wiki/World_Values_Survey) about 90% of [African Christians](/wiki/Christianity_in_Africa) (in [Ghana](/wiki/Ghana), [Nigeria](/wiki/Nigeria), [Rwanda](/wiki/Rwanda), [South Africa](/wiki/South_Africa) and [Zimbabwe](/wiki/Zimbabwe)) said they attended church regularly.[[238]](#cite_note-242) Christianity, in one form or another, is the sole [state religion](/wiki/State_religion) of the following nations: Argentina (Roman Catholic),[[239]](#cite_note-243) [Tuvalu](/wiki/Tuvalu) (Reformed), [Tonga](/wiki/Tonga) (Methodist), Norway (Lutheran),[[240]](#cite_note-244)[[241]](#cite_note-245)[[242]](#cite_note-246) Costa Rica (Roman Catholic),[[243]](#cite_note-247) Kingdom of Denmark (Lutheran),[[244]](#cite_note-248) England (Anglican),[[245]](#cite_note-249) Georgia (Georgian Orthodox),[[246]](#cite_note-250) [Greece](/wiki/Greece) (Greek Orthodox),[[247]](#cite_note-251) Iceland (Lutheran),[[248]](#cite_note-252) Liechtenstein (Roman Catholic),[[249]](#cite_note-253) Malta (Roman Catholic),[[250]](#cite_note-254) Monaco (Roman Catholic),[[251]](#cite_note-255) and [Vatican City](/wiki/Vatican_City) (Roman Catholic).[[252]](#cite_note-256) There are numerous other countries, such as Cyprus, which although do not have an [established church](/wiki/Established_church), still give official recognition and support to a specific [Christian denomination](/wiki/Christian_denomination).[[253]](#cite_note-257) <gallery> File:Christian world map.png|Countries with 50% or more Christians are colored purple while countries with 10% to 50% Christians are colored pink File:Map of state religions.svg|Nations with Christianity as their [state religion](/wiki/State_religion): Roman Catholicism - cyan, Protestant - dark blue, Orthodox - blue File:Catholic population.svg|Distribution of Roman Catholics File:Countries by percentage of Protestants.svg|Distribution of Protestants File:Eastern Orthodoxy by country.png|Distribution of Eastern Orthodox File:Oriental Orthodoxy by country.png|Distribution of Oriental Orthodox </gallery>

## Major denominations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further) The three primary divisions of Christianity are [Roman Catholicism](/wiki/Roman_Catholicism), [Eastern Orthodoxy](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodoxy), and [Protestantism](/wiki/Protestantism).[[26]](#cite_note-30)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)[[254]](#cite_note-258) There are other Christian groups that do not fit neatly into one of these primary categories.[[255]](#cite_note-259) The Nicene Creed is "accepted as authoritative by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and major Protestant churches."[[256]](#cite_note-260) There is a diversity of [doctrines](/wiki/Doctrine) and practices among groups calling themselves Christian. These groups are sometimes classified under [denominations](/wiki/Christian_denomination), though for theological reasons many groups reject this classification system.[[257]](#cite_note-261) A broader distinction that is sometimes drawn is between [Eastern Christianity](/wiki/Eastern_Christianity) and [Western Christianity](/wiki/Western_Christianity), which has its origins in the [East–West Schism](/wiki/East–West_Schism) (Great Schism) of the 11th century.

In addition to the [Lutheran](/wiki/Lutheran) and [Reformed](/wiki/Reformed) (or Calvinist) branches of the Reformation, there is [Anglicanism](/wiki/Anglicanism) after the [English Reformation](/wiki/English_Reformation). The [Anabaptist](/wiki/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](/wiki/Adventist), [Baptist](/wiki/Baptist), [Methodist](/wiki/Methodist), [Pentecostal](/wiki/Pentecostal) and [other Protestant](/wiki/List_of_Christian_denominations#Protestantism) 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.[[258]](#cite_note-262) [Template:Christian denomination tree](/wiki/Template:Christian_denomination_tree)

### Catholic[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Franciscus_in_2015.jpg)[Pope Francis](/wiki/Pope_Francis), current leader of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church consists of those [particular Churches](/wiki/Particular_Church), headed by bishops, in communion with the [Pope](/wiki/Pope), the Bishop of Rome, as its highest authority in matters of faith, morality and Church governance.[[259]](#cite_note-263)[[260]](#cite_note-264) Like the [Eastern Orthodox](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox), the Roman Catholic Church through [apostolic succession](/wiki/Apostolic_succession) traces its origins to the Christian community founded by Jesus Christ.[[261]](#cite_note-265)[[262]](#cite_note-266) Catholics maintain that the "[one, holy, catholic and apostolic church](/wiki/Four_Marks_of_the_Church)" founded by Jesus [subsists fully](/wiki/%22Subsistit_in%22_in_Lumen_Gentium) in the Roman Catholic Church, but also acknowledges other Christian churches and communities[[263]](#cite_note-267)[[264]](#cite_note-268) and works towards [reconciliation](/wiki/Ecumenism) among all Christians.[[263]](#cite_note-267) The Catholic faith is detailed in the [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](/wiki/Catechism_of_the_Catholic_Church).[[265]](#cite_note-269)[[266]](#cite_note-270) The 2,834 [sees](/wiki/Episcopal_see)[[267]](#cite_note-271) are grouped into [24 particular rites](/wiki/Sui_iuris#Catholic_ecclesiastical_use), the largest being the [Latin Church](/wiki/Latin_Church), each with distinct traditions regarding the [liturgy](/wiki/Liturgy) and the administering the [sacraments](/wiki/Sacraments_of_the_Catholic_Church).[[268]](#cite_note-272) With more than 1.1 billion baptized members, the Catholic Church is the largest [church](/wiki/Ecclesia_(church)) representing over half of all Christians and one sixth of the [world's population](/wiki/World_population).<ref name=autogenerated1>[Central Intelligence Agency](/wiki/Central_Intelligence_Agency), [*CIA World Factbook*](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html) (2007).</ref>[[269]](#cite_note-273)[[270]](#cite_note-274) Various smaller communities, such as the [Old Catholic](/wiki/Old_Catholic_Church) and [Independent Catholic Churches](/wiki/Independent_Catholic_Churches), include the word *Catholic* in their title, and share much in common with Roman Catholicism but are no longer in [communion](/wiki/Communion_(Christian)) with the [See of Rome](/wiki/Holy_See).

### Orthodox[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|right|](/wiki/File:Moscow_July_2011-7a.jpg)[Cathedral of Christ the Saviour](/wiki/Cathedral_of_Christ_the_Saviour) in [Moscow](/wiki/Moscow) it is the tallest [Eastern Orthodox Christian](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church) church in the world.

The Eastern Orthodox Church consists of those churches in communion with the [Patriarchal](/wiki/Patriarch) Sees of the East, such as the [Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople](/wiki/Ecumenical_Patriarch_of_Constantinople).[[271]](#cite_note-275) Like the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church also traces its heritage to the foundation of Christianity through [apostolic succession](/wiki/Apostolic_succession) and has an [episcopal](/wiki/Episcopal_polity) structure, though the [autonomy](/wiki/Autocephaly) 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](/wiki/East-West_Schism). Eastern Orthodoxy is the second largest single denomination in Christianity, with an estimated 225–300 million adherents.[[6]](#cite_note-7)[[269]](#cite_note-273)<ref name=aboutWeb>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> The [Oriental Orthodox churches](/wiki/Oriental_Orthodoxy) (also called "Old Oriental" churches) are those eastern churches that recognize the first three ecumenical councils—[Nicaea](/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea), [Constantinople](/wiki/First_Council_of_Constantinople) and [Ephesus](/wiki/First_Council_of_Ephesus)—but reject the dogmatic definitions of the [Council of Chalcedon](/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon) and instead espouse a [Miaphysite](/wiki/Miaphysite) [christology](/wiki/Christology). The Oriental Orthodox communion consists of six groups: [Syriac Orthodox](/wiki/Syriac_Orthodox), [Coptic Orthodox](/wiki/Coptic_Orthodox_Church_of_Alexandria), [Ethiopian Orthodox](/wiki/Ethiopian_Orthodox), [Eritrean Orthodox](/wiki/Eritrean_Orthodox), [Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church](/wiki/Malankara_Orthodox_Syrian_Church) (India) and [Armenian Apostolic](/wiki/Armenian_Apostolic) churches.[[272]](#cite_note-276) These six churches, while being in communion with each other are completely independent hierarchically.[[273]](#cite_note-277) These churches are generally not in communion with [Eastern Orthodox Churches](/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Churches) with whom they are in dialogue for erecting a communion.[[274]](#cite_note-278)

### Protestant[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=33)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:Protestantism](/wiki/Template:Protestantism)

In the 16th century, [Martin Luther](/wiki/Martin_Luther), and subsequently [Huldrych Zwingli](/wiki/Huldrych_Zwingli) and [John Calvin](/wiki/John_Calvin), inaugurated what has come to be called [Protestantism](/wiki/Protestantism). Luther's primary theological heirs are known as [Lutherans](/wiki/Lutheranism). Zwingli and Calvin's heirs are far broader denominationally, and are broadly referred to as the [Reformed tradition](/wiki/Reformed).[[275]](#cite_note-279) The oldest Protestant groups separated from the Catholic Church in the [Protestant Reformation](/wiki/Protestant_Reformation), often followed by further divisions.[[275]](#cite_note-279) In the 18th century, for example, [Methodism](/wiki/Methodism) grew out of [Anglican](/wiki/Anglican) minister [John Wesley's](/wiki/John_Wesley) evangelical and [revival movement](/wiki/Holiness_Movement).[[276]](#cite_note-280) Several [Pentecostal](/wiki/Pentecostal) and [non-denominational churches](/wiki/Nondenominational_Christianity), which emphasize the cleansing power of the [Holy Spirit](/wiki/Holy_Spirit), in turn grew out of Methodism.[[277]](#cite_note-281) Because Methodists, Pentecostals, and other evangelicals stress "accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior",[[278]](#cite_note-282) which comes from Wesley's emphasis of the [New Birth](/wiki/Born_again_(Christianity)),[[279]](#cite_note-283) they often refer to themselves as being [born-again](/wiki/Born_again_Christianity).[[280]](#cite_note-284)[[281]](#cite_note-285) 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).[[269]](#cite_note-273) Often that number is put at more than 800 million, corresponding to nearly 40% of world's Christians.[[282]](#cite_note-286) The majority of Protestants are members of just a handful of denominational families, i.e. [Adventists](/wiki/Adventism), [Anglicans](/wiki/Anglicanism), [Baptists](/wiki/Baptists), [Reformed (Calvinists)](/wiki/Calvinism),[[283]](#cite_note-287) [Lutherans](/wiki/Lutheranism), [Methodists](/wiki/Methodism) and [Pentecostals](/wiki/Pentecostalism).[[282]](#cite_note-286) [Nondenominational](/wiki/Nondenominational_Christianity), [evangelical](/wiki/Evangelicalism), [charismatic](/wiki/Charismatic_Movement), [neo-charismatic](/wiki/Neo-charismatic_churches), independent and other churches are on the rise, and constitute a significant part of Protestant Christianity.[[284]](#cite_note-288) A special grouping are the Anglican churches descended from the [Church of England](/wiki/Church_of_England) and organized in the [Anglican Communion](/wiki/Anglican_Communion). Some Anglican churches consider themselves both Protestant and Catholic.[[285]](#cite_note-289) Some Anglicans consider their church a [branch of the "One Holy Catholic Church"](/wiki/Branch_theory) alongside of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, a concept rejected by the Roman Catholic Church and some Eastern Orthodox.[[286]](#cite_note-290)[[287]](#cite_note-291) While Anglicans, Lutherans and the Reformed branches of Protestantism originated in the [Magisterial Reformation](/wiki/Magisterial_Reformation), other Protestant groups such as the [Anabaptists](/wiki/Anabaptists) (mostly made-up of [Amish](/wiki/Amish), [Mennonites](/wiki/Mennonites), [Hutterites](/wiki/Hutterites) and [Schwarzenau Brethren](/wiki/Schwarzenau_Brethren)/[German Baptist](/wiki/German_Baptist) groups), originated in the [Radical Reformation](/wiki/Radical_Reformation) and are distinguished by their belief in [credobaptism](/wiki/Credobaptism).[[288]](#cite_note-292) Some groups of individuals who hold basic Protestant tenets identify themselves simply as "Christians" or "[born-again](/wiki/Born-again) Christians". They typically distance themselves from the [confessionalism](/wiki/Confessionalism_(religion)) and/or [creedalism](/wiki/Creed) of other Christian communities[[289]](#cite_note-293) by calling themselves "[non-denominational](/wiki/Non-denominational_Christianity)" or "[evangelical](/wiki/Evangelical)". Often founded by individual pastors, they have little affiliation with historic denominations.[[290]](#cite_note-294) [650px|center|Historical chart of the main Protestant branches](/wiki/File:Protestant_branches.svg)

### Restorationists and others[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=34)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [180px|thumb|right|A 19th-century drawing of](/wiki/File:Priesthood03080u.jpg) [Joseph Smith](/wiki/Joseph_Smith) and [Oliver Cowdery](/wiki/Oliver_Cowdery) receiving the [Aaronic priesthood](/wiki/Aaronic_priesthood_(Latter_Day_Saints)) from [John the Baptist](/wiki/John_the_Baptist). [Latter Day Saints](/wiki/Latter_Day_Saint_movement) believe that the [Priesthood](/wiki/Priest#Christianity) ceased to exist after the death of the [Apostles](/wiki/Apostle_(Christian)) and therefore needed to be [restored](/wiki/Restoration_(Latter_Day_Saints)).

The [Second Great Awakening](/wiki/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](/wiki/Restorationism) the original church of Jesus Christ rather than reforming one of the existing churches.[[291]](#cite_note-295) 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](/wiki/Great_Apostasy).[[292]](#cite_note-296) In Asia, [Iglesia ni Cristo](/wiki/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](/wiki/Millennialism) and [Adventism](/wiki/Adventist), which arose from Evangelical Protestantism, influenced the [Jehovah's Witnesses](/wiki/Jehovah's_Witnesses) movement and, as a reaction specifically to [William Miller](/wiki/William_Miller_(preacher)), the [Seventh-day Adventists](/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_Church). Others, including the [Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)](/wiki/Christian_Church_(Disciples_of_Christ)), [Evangelical Christian Church in Canada](/wiki/Evangelical_Christian_Church_in_Canada),[[293]](#cite_note-297)[[294]](#cite_note-298) [Churches of Christ](/wiki/Churches_of_Christ), and the [Christian churches and churches of Christ](/wiki/Christian_churches_and_churches_of_Christ), have their roots in the contemporaneous Stone-Campbell [Restoration Movement](/wiki/Restoration_Movement), which was centered in Kentucky and Tennessee. Other groups originating in this time period include the [Christadelphians](/wiki/Christadelphians) and [Latter Day Saint movement](/wiki/Latter_Day_Saint_movement). While the churches originating in the Second Great Awakening have some superficial similarities, their doctrine and practices vary significantly.

[Esoteric Christians](/wiki/Esoteric_Christianity) regard Christianity as a [mystery religion](/wiki/Western_esotericism),[[295]](#cite_note-299)[[296]](#cite_note-300) and profess the existence and possession of certain [esoteric](/wiki/Esotericism) doctrines or practices,[[297]](#cite_note-301)[[298]](#cite_note-302) hidden from the public but accessible only to a narrow circle of "enlightened", "initiated", or highly educated people.[[299]](#cite_note-303)[[300]](#cite_note-304) Some of the esoteric Christian institutions include the [Rosicrucian Fellowship](/wiki/Rosicrucian_Fellowship), the [Anthroposophical Society](/wiki/Anthroposophical_Society) and the [Martinism](/wiki/Martinism).

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

## Christian culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further) [thumb|275px|Set of pictures showcasing Christian culture and famous Christian leaders.](/wiki/File:Collage-Christian-culture.jpg)

[Western culture](/wiki/Western_culture), throughout most of its history, has been nearly equivalent to [Christian culture](/wiki/Christian_culture), and many of the population of the Western hemisphere could broadly be described as cultural Christians. The notion of "[Europe](/wiki/Europe)" and the "[Western World](/wiki/Western_World)" has been intimately connected with the concept of "[Christianity and Christendom](/wiki/Christendom)" many even attribute Christianity for being the link that created a unified [European identity](/wiki/European_identity).[[301]](#cite_note-305) Though Western culture contained several polytheistic religions during its early years under the [Greek](/wiki/Ancient_Greece) and [Roman empires](/wiki/Roman_Empire), as the centralized Roman power waned, the dominance of the Catholic Church was the only consistent force in Europe.[[302]](#cite_note-306) Until the [Age of Enlightenment](/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment),[[303]](#cite_note-307) [Christian culture](/wiki/Christian_culture) guided the course of [philosophy](/wiki/Philosophy), [literature](/wiki/Literature), [art](/wiki/Art), [music](/wiki/Music) and [science](/wiki/Science).[[302]](#cite_note-306)[[304]](#cite_note-308) Christian disciplines of the respective arts have subsequently developed into [Christian philosophy](/wiki/Christian_philosophy), [Christian art](/wiki/Christian_art), [Christian music](/wiki/Christian_music), [Christian literature](/wiki/Christian_literature) etc.

Christianity had a significant impact on [education](/wiki/Education) and [science](/wiki/Science) and [medicine](/wiki/Medicine) as the church created the bases of the Western system of education,[[305]](#cite_note-309) and was the sponsor of founding [universities](/wiki/Medieval_university) in the [Western world](/wiki/Western_world) as the [university](/wiki/University) is generally regarded as an institution that has its origin in the [Medieval Christian](/wiki/History_of_Christianity) setting.[[150]](#cite_note-154)[[306]](#cite_note-310) Many [clerics](/wiki/List_of_Roman_Catholic_cleric-scientists) throughout history have made significant [contributions to science](/wiki/Christian_attitudes_towards_science) and [Jesuits](/wiki/List_of_Jesuit_scientists) in particular have made numerous significant contributions to the [development of science](/wiki/History_of_science).[[307]](#cite_note-311)[Template:Sfn](/wiki/Template:Sfn)[[308]](#cite_note-312) The Civilizing influence of Christianity includes [social welfare](/wiki/Social_welfare),[[309]](#cite_note-313) founding [hospitals](/wiki/Hospitals),[[310]](#cite_note-314) [economics](/wiki/Economics) (as the [Protestant work ethic](/wiki/Protestant_work_ethic)),[[311]](#cite_note-315)[[312]](#cite_note-316) [politics](/wiki/Politics),[[313]](#cite_note-317) [architecture](/wiki/Architecture),<ref name= BF>Sir [Banister Fletcher](/wiki/Banister_Fletcher), *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*.</ref> [literature](/wiki/Literature)[[314]](#cite_note-318) and [family](/wiki/Family) life.[[315]](#cite_note-319) [Eastern Christians](/wiki/Eastern_Christians) (particularly [Nestorian](/wiki/Nestorianism) [Christians](/wiki/Christians)) contributed to the Arab [Islamic Civilization](/wiki/Islamic_Golden_Age) during the [Ummayad](/wiki/Ummayads) and the [Abbasid](/wiki/Abbasids) periods by translating works of [Greek philosophers](/wiki/Greek_philosophers) to [Syriac](/wiki/Syriac_language) and afterwards to [Arabic](/wiki/Arabic_language).[[316]](#cite_note-320)[[317]](#cite_note-321)[[318]](#cite_note-322) They also excelled in [philosophy](/wiki/Philosophy), [science](/wiki/Science), [theology](/wiki/Theology) and [medicine](/wiki/Medicine).[[319]](#cite_note-323)[[320]](#cite_note-324) [Christians](/wiki/Lists_of_Christians) have made a myriad contributions in a broad and diverse range of fields, including the [sciences](/wiki/Sciences), [arts](/wiki/Arts), [politics](/wiki/Politics), [literatures](/wiki/Literatures) and [business](/wiki/Business).[[321]](#cite_note-325)[[322]](#cite_note-326)[[323]](#cite_note-327)[[324]](#cite_note-328)[[325]](#cite_note-329)[[326]](#cite_note-330) According to *100 Years of Nobel Prizes* a review of Nobel prizes award between 1901 and 2000 reveals that (65.4%) of [Nobel Prizes](/wiki/Nobel_Prizes) Laureates, have identified [Christianity](/wiki/List_of_Christian_Nobel_laureates) in its various forms as their religious preference.[[327]](#cite_note-331) [*Postchristianity*](/wiki/Postchristianity)[[328]](#cite_note-332) is the term for the decline of Christianity, particularly [in Europe](/wiki/Christianity_in_Europe), [Canada](/wiki/Religion_in_Canada), [Australia](/wiki/Christianity_in_Australia) and to a minor degree the [Southern Cone](/wiki/Southern_Cone), in the 20th and 21st centuries, considered in terms of [postmodernism](/wiki/Postmodernism). It refers to the loss of Christianity's monopoly on [values](/wiki/Values) and [world view](/wiki/World_view) in historically Christian societies.

[Cultural Christians](/wiki/Cultural_Christian) 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](/wiki/Christian_pop_culture), art, [music](/wiki/Christian_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[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=36)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|left|Ecumenical worship service at the](/wiki/File:Taizé_prayer.JPG) [monastery](/wiki/Monastery) of [Taizé](/wiki/Taizé) in France

Christian groups and denominations have long expressed ideals of being reconciled, and in the 20th century, Christian [ecumenism](/wiki/Ecumenism) advanced in two ways.[[329]](#cite_note-333) One way was greater cooperation between groups, such as the [Edinburgh Missionary Conference](/wiki/Edinburgh_Missionary_Conference) of Protestants in 1910, the Justice, Peace and Creation Commission of the [World Council of Churches](/wiki/World_Council_of_Churches) founded in 1948 by Protestant and Orthodox churches, and similar national councils like the [National Council of Churches in Australia](/wiki/National_Council_of_Churches_in_Australia) which includes Roman Catholics.[[329]](#cite_note-333) The other way was institutional union with new [United and uniting churches](/wiki/United_and_uniting_churches). Congregationalist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches united in 1925 to form the [United Church of Canada](/wiki/United_Church_of_Canada),[[330]](#cite_note-334) and in 1977 to form the [Uniting Church in Australia](/wiki/Uniting_Church_in_Australia). The [Church of South India](/wiki/Church_of_South_India) was formed in 1947 by the union of Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian churches.[[331]](#cite_note-335) The ecumenical, [monastic](/wiki/Monasticism) [Taizé Community](/wiki/Taizé_Community) is notable for being composed of more than one hundred [brothers](/wiki/Monk) from Protestant and Catholic traditions.[[332]](#cite_note-336) The community emphasizes the reconciliation of all denominations and its main church, located in [Taizé, Saône-et-Loire](/wiki/Taizé,_Saône-et-Loire), France, is named the "Church of Reconciliation".[[332]](#cite_note-336) The community is internationally known, attracting over 100,000 young pilgrims annually.[[333]](#cite_note-337) 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](/wiki/East-West_Schism) in 1054;[[334]](#cite_note-338) the [Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission](/wiki/Anglican_Roman_Catholic_International_Commission) (ARCIC) working towards full communion between those churches since 1970;[[335]](#cite_note-339) and some [Lutheran](/wiki/Lutheran_World_Federation) and Roman Catholic churches signing the [Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification](/wiki/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](/wiki/World_Methodist_Council), representing all Methodist denominations, adopted the declaration.[[336]](#cite_note-340)

## Criticism and apologetics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=37)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [200px|thumb|right|A copy of the](/wiki/File:SummaTheologiae.jpg) [*Summa Theologica*](/wiki/Summa_Theologica), a famous Christian apologetic work. Criticism of Christianity and Christians goes back to the [Apostolic age](/wiki/Apostolic_age), with the New Testament recording friction between the followers of Jesus and the [Pharisees](/wiki/Pharisees) and [scribes](/wiki/Scribes) (e.g. [Template:Bibleref](/wiki/Template:Bibleref) and [Template:Bibleref](/wiki/Template:Bibleref)).[[337]](#cite_note-341) 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.[[338]](#cite_note-342) By the 3rd century, criticism of Christianity had mounted, partly as a defense against it, and the 15-volume *Adversus Christianos* by [Porphyry](/wiki/Porphyry_(philosopher)) was written as a comprehensive attack on Christianity, in part building on the pre-Christian concepts of [Plotinus](/wiki/Plotinus).[[339]](#cite_note-343)[[340]](#cite_note-344) By the 12th century, the [Mishneh Torah](/wiki/Mishneh_Torah) (i.e., [Rabbi](/wiki/Rabbi) [Moses Maimonides](/wiki/Moses_Maimonides)) was criticizing Christianity on the grounds of idol worship, in that Christians attributed divinity to Jesus who had a physical body.[[341]](#cite_note-345) In the 19th century, [Nietzsche](/wiki/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.[[342]](#cite_note-346) In the 20th century, the philosopher [Bertrand Russell](/wiki/Bertrand_Russell) expressed his criticism of Christianity in [*Why I Am Not a Christian*](/wiki/Why_I_Am_Not_a_Christian), formulating his rejection of Christianity in the setting of logical arguments.[[343]](#cite_note-347) Criticism of Christianity continues to date, e.g. [Jewish](/wiki/Jewish) and [Muslim](/wiki/Muslim) theologians criticize the doctrine of the [Trinity](/wiki/Trinity) held by most Christians, stating that this doctrine in effect assumes that there are three Gods, running against the basic tenet of [monotheism](/wiki/Monotheism).[[344]](#cite_note-348) New Testament scholar [Robert M. Price](/wiki/Robert_M._Price) has outlined the possibility that some Bible stories are based partly on myth in "The Christ Myth Theory and its problems".[[345]](#cite_note-349) Christian apologetics aims to present a [rational](/wiki/Reason) 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](/wiki/Thomas_Aquinas) presented five arguments for God's existence in the [*Summa Theologica*](/wiki/Summa_Theologica), while his [*Summa contra Gentiles*](/wiki/Summa_contra_Gentiles) was a major apologetic work.[[346]](#cite_note-350)[[347]](#cite_note-351) Another famous apologist, [G. K. Chesterton](/wiki/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.[[348]](#cite_note-352) He pointed to the [advance of Christian civilizations](/wiki/Role_of_the_Christian_Church_in_civilization) as proof of its practicality.[[349]](#cite_note-353)