Christianity

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Its adherents, known as Christians, believe that Jesus is the Christ, whose coming as the messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible, called the Old Testament in Christianity, and chronicled in the New Testament.[1] It is the world's largest religion with about 2.4 billion followers.[2]

Christianity began as a Second Temple Judaic sect in the 1st century in the Roman province of Judea. Jesus' apostles and their followers spread around Syria, the Levant, Europe, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Transcaucasia, Egypt, and Ethiopia, despite initial persecution. It soon attracted gentile God-fearers, which led to a departure from Jewish customs, and, after the Fall of Jerusalem, AD 70 which ended the Temple-based Judaism, Christianity slowly separated from Judaism.

Emperor Constantine the Great converted to Christianity before his death (337), and was baptized by bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia; Constantine decriminalized Christianity in the Roman Empire by the Edict of Milan (313), later convening the Council of Nicaea (325) where Early Christianity was consolidated into what would become the State church of the Roman Empire (380). The early history of Christianity's united church before major schisms is sometimes referred to as the "Great Church". The Church of the East split after the Council of Ephesus (431) and Oriental Orthodoxy split after the Council of Chalcedon (451) over differences in Christology,[3] while the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church separated in the East–West Schism (1054), especially over the authority of the bishop of Rome. Similarly, Protestantism split in numerous denominations from the Latin Catholic Church in the Reformation era (16th century) over theological and ecclesiological disputes, most predominantly on the issue of justification and the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Following the Age of Discovery (15th–17th century), Christianity was spread into the Americas, Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa, and the rest of the world via missionary work.[4][5][6]

Christianity remains culturally diverse in its Western and Eastern branches, as well as in its doctrines concerning justification and the nature of salvation, ecclesiology, ordination, and Christology. The four largest branches of Christianity are the Catholic Church (1.3 billion/50.1%), Protestantism (920 million/36.7%), the Eastern Orthodox Church (260 million) and Oriental Orthodoxy (86 million/both together 11.9%), amid various efforts toward unity (ecumenism).[7] Their creeds generally hold in common Jesus as the Son of God—the logos incarnated—who ministered, suffered, and died on a cross, but rose from the dead for the salvation of mankind; as referred to as the gospel, meaning the "good news", in the Bible (scripture). Describing Jesus' life and teachings are the four canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John with the Jewish Old Testament as the gospel's respected background.

Christianity and Christian ethics played a prominent role in the development of Western civilization,[8][9][10][11][12] particularly around Europe from late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Despite a decline in adherence in the West, Christianity remains the dominant religion in the region, with about 70% of the population identifying as Christian.[13] Christianity is growing in Africa and Asia, the world's most populous continents.[14] Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world, especially in the Middle-East, North Africa and South Asia.[15][16][17]

Contents

Etymology

Early Jewish Christians referred to themselves as 'The Way' (της οδου), probably coming from Isaiah 40:3, "prepare the way of the Lord."[18][note 1] According to Acts 11:26, the term "Christian" (Greek: Χριστιανός) was first used in reference to Jesus's disciples in the city of Antioch, meaning "followers of Christ," by the non-Jewish inhabitants of Antioch.[24] The earliest recorded use of the term "Christianity" (Greek: Χριστιανισμός) was by Ignatius of Antioch, in around 100 AD.[25]

Beliefs

While Christians worldwide share basic convictions, there are also differences of interpretations and opinions of the Bible and sacred traditions on which Christianity is based.[26]

Creeds

Concise doctrinal statements or confessions of religious beliefs are known as creeds. They began as baptismal formulae and were later expanded during the Christological controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries to become statements of faith.

The Apostles' Creed is the most widely accepted statement of the articles of Christian faith. It is used by a number of Christian denominations for both liturgical and catechetical purposes, most visibly by liturgical churches of Western Christian tradition, including the Latin Church of the Catholic Church, Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and Western Rite Orthodoxy. It is also used by Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists. This particular creed was developed between the 2nd and 9th centuries. Its central doctrines are those of the Trinity and God the Creator. Each of the doctrines found in this creed can be traced to statements current in the apostolic period. The creed was apparently used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome.[27] Its points include:

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

- Belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit
- The death, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension of Christ
- The holiness of the Church and the communion of saints
- Christ's second coming, the Day of Judgement and salvation of the faithful

The Nicene Creed was formulated, largely in response to Arianism, at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in 325 and 381 respectively,[28][29] and ratified as the universal creed of Christendom by the First Council of Ephesus in 431.[30]

The Chalcedonian Definition, or Creed of Chalcedon, developed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451,[31] though rejected by the Oriental Orthodox,[32] 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.[33]

The Athanasian Creed, received in the Western Church as having the same status as the Nicene and Chalcedonian, says: "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance."[34]

Most Christians (Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Protestant alike) accept the use of creeds, and subscribe to at least one of the creeds mentioned above.[35]

Many Evangelical Protestants reject creeds as definitive statements of faith, even while agreeing with some or all of the substance of the creeds. Most Baptists do not use creeds "in that they have not sought to establish binding authoritative confessions of faith on one another."[36]:111 Also rejecting creeds are groups with roots in the Restoration Movement, such as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Evangelical Christian Church in Canada, and the Churches of Christ.[37][38]:14–15[39]:123

Jesus

The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus, as the Messiah, was anointed by God as savior of humanity and hold that Jesus' coming was the fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The Christian concept of messiah differs significantly from the contemporary Jewish concept. The core Christian belief is that through belief in and acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, sinful humans can be reconciled to God, and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of eternal life.[40]

While there have been many theological disputes over the nature of Jesus over the earliest centuries of Christian history, generally, Christians believe that Jesus is God incarnate and "true God and true man" (or both fully divine and fully human). Jesus, having become fully human, suffered the pains and temptations of a mortal man, but did not sin. As fully God, he rose to life again. According to the New Testament, he rose from the dead,[41] ascended to heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father,[42] and will ultimately return[Acts 1:9–11] to fulfill the rest of the Messianic prophecy, including the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God.
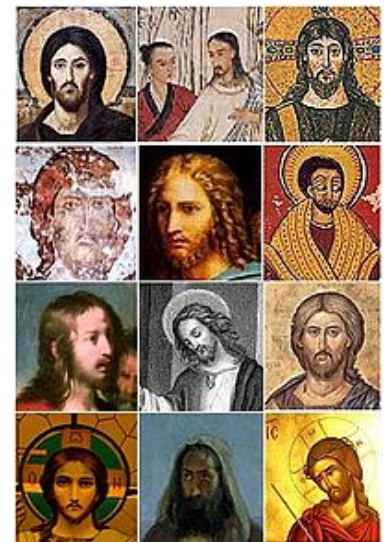
Various depictions of Jesus

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

Death and resurrection

Christians consider the resurrection of Jesus to be the cornerstone of their faith (see 1 Corinthians 15) and the most important event in history.[43] Among Christian beliefs, the death and resurrection of Jesus are two core events on which much of Christian doctrine and theology is based.[44] According to the New Testament, Jesus was crucified, died a physical death, was buried within a tomb, and rose from the dead three days later.[Jn. 19:30–31] [Mk. 16:1] [16:6]

The New Testament mentions several resurrection appearances of Jesus on different occasions to his twelve apostles and disciples, including "more than five hundred brethren at once",[1Cor 15:6] before Jesus' ascension to heaven. Jesus' death and resurrection are commemorated by Christians in all worship services, with special emphasis during Holy Week, which includes Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are usually considered the most important events in Christian theology, partly because they demonstrate that Jesus has power over life and death and therefore has the authority and power to give people eternal life.[45]

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

Crucifixion, representing the death of Jesus on the Cross, painting by Diego Velázquez, c. 1632
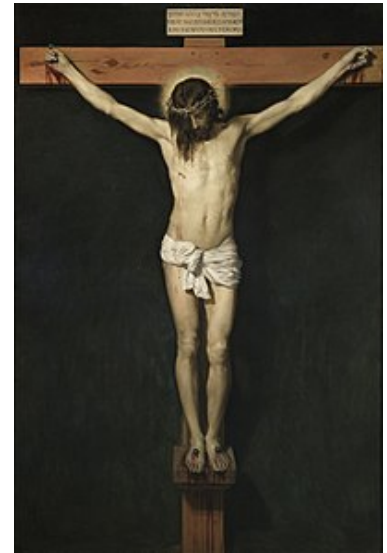
Salvation

Paul the Apostle, like Jews and Roman pagans of his time, believed that sacrifice can bring about new kinship ties, purity, and eternal life.[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".[Gal. 3:29][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".[Rom. 8:9,11,16][52]

"The Law and the Gospel" by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1529); Moses and Elijah point the sinner to Jesus for salvation

Modern Christian churches tend to be much more concerned with how humanity can be saved from a universal condition of sin and death than the question of how both Jews and Gentiles can be in God's family. According to Eastern Orthodox theology, based upon their understanding of the atonement as put forward by Irenaeus' recapitulation theory, Jesus' death is a ransom. This restores the relation with God, who is loving and reaches out to humanity, and offers the possibility of *theosis* c.q. divinization, becoming the kind of humans God wants humanity to be. According to Catholic doctrine, Jesus' death satisfies the wrath of God, aroused by the offense to God's honor caused by human's sinfulness. 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.[54][55] In Protestant theology, Jesus' death is regarded as a substitionary penalty carried by Jesus, for the debt that has to be paid by humankind when it broke God's moral law. Martin Luther taught that baptism was necessary for salvation, but modern Lutherans and other Protestants tend to teach that salvation is a gift that comes to an individual by God's grace, sometimes defined as "unmerited favor", even apart from baptism.

Christians differ in their views on the extent to which individuals' salvation is pre-ordained by God. Reformed theology places distinctive emphasis on grace by teaching that individuals are completely incapable of self-redemption, but that sanctifying grace is irresistible.[56] In contrast Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Arminian Protestants believe that the exercise of free will is necessary to have faith in Jesus.[57]
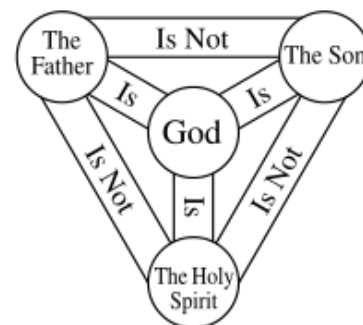
Trinity

Trinity refers to the teaching that the one God[59] comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons: the *Father*, the *Son* (incarnate in Jesus Christ), and the *Holy Spirit*. Together, these three persons are sometimes called the Godhead,[60][61][62] although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead.[63] In the words of the Athanasian Creed, an early statement of Christian belief, "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God".[64] They are distinct from another: the Father has no source, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Though distinct, the three persons cannot be divided from one another in being or in operation. While some Christians also believe that God appeared as the Father in the Old Testament, it is agreed that he appeared as the Son in the New Testament, and will still continue to manifest as the Holy Spirit in the present. But still, God still existed as three persons in each of these times.[65] However, traditionally there is a belief that it was the Son who appeared in the Old Testament

The Trinity is the belief that God is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit[58]

because, for example, when the Trinity is depicted in art, the Son typically has the distinctive appearance, a cruciform halo identifying Christ, and in depictions of the Garden of Eden, this looks forward to an Incarnation yet to occur. In some Early Christian sarcophagi the Logos is distinguished with a beard, "which allows him to appear ancient, even pre-existent."[66]

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

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

The Greek word *trias*[70][note 2] is first seen in this sense in the works of Theophilus of Antioch; his text reads: "of the Trinity, of God, and of His Word, and of His Wisdom".[74] The term may have been in use before this time; its Latin equivalent,[note 2] *trinitas*,[72] appears afterwards with an explicit reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in Tertullian.[75][76] In the following century, the word was in general use. It is found in many passages of Origen.[77]

Trinitarians

Trinitarianism denotes Christians who believe in the concept of the Trinity. Almost all Christian denominations and churches hold Trinitarian beliefs. Although the words "Trinity" and "Triune" do not appear in the Bible, theologians, beginning in the 3rd century, developed the term and concept to facilitate comprehension of the New Testament teachings of God as being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since that time, Christian theologians have been careful to emphasize that Trinity does not imply that there are three gods (the antitrinitarian heresy of Tritheism), nor that each hypostasis of the Trinity is one-third of an infinite God (partialism), nor that the Son and the Holy Spirit are beings created by and subordinate to the Father (Arianism). Rather, the Trinity is defined as one God in three persons.[78]

Nontrinitarianism

Nontrinitarianism (or *antitrinitarianism*) refers to theology that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. Various nontrinitarian views, such as adoptionism or modalism, existed in early Christianity, leading to the disputes about Christology.[79] Nontrinitarianism later appeared again in the Gnosticism of the Cathars between the 11th and 13th centuries, among groups with Unitarian theology in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century,[80] in the 18th-century Enlightenment, and in some groups arising during the Second Great Awakening of the 19th century.

Eschatology

The end of things, whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, or the end of the world, broadly speaking, is Christian eschatology; the study of the destiny of humans as it is revealed in the Bible. The major issues in Christian eschatology are the Tribulation, death and the afterlife, (mainly for Evangelical groups) the Millennium and the following Rapture, the Second Coming of Jesus, Resurrection of the Dead, Heaven, (for liturgical branches) Purgatory, and Hell, the Last Judgment, the end of the world, and the New Heavens and New Earth.

The 7th-century Khor Virap monastery in the shadow of Mount Ararat; Armenia was the first state to adopt Christianity as the state religion, in AD 301[81]

Christians believe that the second coming of Christ will occur at the end of time, after a period of severe persecution (the Great Tribulation). All who have died will be resurrected bodily from the dead for the Last Judgment. Jesus will fully establish the Kingdom of God in fulfillment of scriptural prophecies.[82][83]

Death and afterlife

Most Christians believe that human beings experience divine judgment and are rewarded either with eternal life or eternal damnation. This includes the general judgement at the resurrection of the dead as well as the belief (held by Catholics,[84][85] Orthodox[86][87] and most Protestants) in a judgment particular to the individual soul upon physical death.

In the liturgical branches (e.g. Catholicism or Eastern or Oriental Orthodoxy), those who die in a state of grace, i.e., without any mortal sin separating them from God, but are still imperfectly purified from the effects of sin, undergo purification through the intermediate state of purgatory to achieve the holiness necessary for entrance into God's presence.[88] Those who have attained this goal are called *saints* (Latin *sanctus*, "holy").[89]

Some Christian groups, such as Seventh-day Adventists, hold to mortalism, the belief that the human soul is not naturally immortal, and is unconscious during the intermediate state between bodily death and resurrection. These Christians also hold to Annihilationism, the belief that subsequent to the final judgement, the wicked will cease to exist rather than suffer everlasting torment. Jehovah's Witnesses hold to a similar view.[90]

Practices

Depending on the specific denomination of Christianity, practices may include baptism, Eucharist (Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper), prayer (including the Lord's Prayer), confession, confirmation, burial rites, marriage rites and the religious education of children. Most denominations have ordained clergy and hold regular group worship services.

Communal worship

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

> And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.[91]

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

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

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

A modern Protestant worship band leading a contemporary worship session

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

Nearly all forms of churchmanship celebrate the Eucharist (Holy Communion), which consists of a consecrated meal. It is reenacted in accordance with Jesus' instruction at the Last Supper that his followers do in remembrance of him as when he gave his disciples bread, saying, "This is my body", and gave them wine saying, "This is my blood".[92] Some Christian denominations practice closed communion. They offer communion to those who are already united in that denomination or sometimes individual church. Catholics restrict participation to their members who are not in a state of mortal sin. Most other churches practice open communion since they view communion as a means to unity, rather than an end, and invite all believing Christians to participate.

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

Sacraments

In Christian belief and practice, a *sacrament* is a rite, instituted by Christ, that confers grace, constituting a sacred mystery. The term is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*, which was used to translate the Greek word for *mystery*. Views concerning both which rites are sacramental, and what it means for an act to be a sacrament, vary among Christian denominations and traditions.[93]

The most conventional functional definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, that conveys an inward, spiritual grace through Christ. The two most widely accepted sacraments are Baptism and the Eucharist (or Holy Communion), however, the majority of Christians also recognize five additional sacraments: Confirmation (Chrismation in the Orthodox tradition), Holy orders (ordination), Penance (or Confession), Anointing of the Sick, and Matrimony (see Christian views on marriage).[93]

Taken together, these are the Seven Sacraments as recognized by churches in the High Church tradition—notably Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Independent Catholic, Old Catholic, many Anglicans, and some Lutherans. Most other denominations and traditions typically affirm only Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments, while some Protestant groups, such as the Quakers, reject sacramental theology.[93] Christian denominations, such as Baptists, which believe these rites do not communicate grace, prefer to call Baptism and Holy Communion *ordinances* rather than sacraments.

> **2nd-century description of the Eucharist**
> And this food is called among us *Eukharistia* [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.
>
> Justin Martyr[91]

In addition to this, the Church of the East has two additional sacraments in place of the traditional sacraments of Matrimony and the Anointing of the Sick. These include Holy Leaven (Melka) and the sign of the cross.[94]

Baptism, specifically infant baptism, in the Lutheran tradition

A penitent confessing his sins in a Ukrainian Catholic church

A Methodist minister celebrating the Eucharist

Confirmation being administered in an Anglican church

Ordination of a priest in the Eastern Orthodox tradition

Crowning during Holy Matrimony in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church

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

Liturgical calendar

Catholics, Anglicans, Eastern Christians, and traditional Protestant communities frame worship around the liturgical year. The liturgical cycle divides the year into a series of seasons, each with their theological emphases, and modes of prayer, which can be signified by different ways of decorating churches, colors of paraments and vestments for clergy,[95] scriptural readings, themes for preaching and even different traditions and practices often observed personally or in the home.

Western Christian liturgical calendars are based on the cycle of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church,[95] and Eastern Christians use analogous calendars based on the cycle of their respective rites. Calendars set aside holy days, such as solemnities which commemorate an event in the life of Jesus, Mary, or the saints, and periods of

fasting, such as Lent and other pious events such as memoria, or lesser festivals commemorating saints. Christian groups that do not follow a liturgical tradition often retain certain celebrations, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost: these are the celebrations of Christ's birth, resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, respectively. A few denominations make no use of a liturgical calendar.[96]

Symbols

Christianity has not generally practiced aniconism, the avoidance or prohibition of devotional images, even if early Jewish Christians and some modern denominations, invoking the Decalogue's prohibition of idolatry, avoided figures in their symbols.

The cross, today one of the most widely recognized symbols, was used by Christians from the earliest times.[97][98] Tertullian, in his book *De Corona*, tells how it was already a tradition for Christians to trace the sign of the cross on their foreheads.[99] Although the cross was known to the early Christians, the crucifix did not appear in use until the 5th century.[100]

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

Among the earliest Christian symbols, that of the fish or Ichthys seems to have ranked first in importance, as seen on monumental sources such as tombs from the first decades of the 2nd century.[101] Its popularity seemingly arose from the Greek word *ichthys* (fish) forming an acronym for the Greek phrase *Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter* (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ),[note 3] (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior), a concise summary of Christian faith.[101]

Other major Christian symbols include the chi-rho monogram, the dove (symbolic of the Holy Spirit), the sacrificial lamb (representing Christ's sacrifice), the vine (symbolizing the connection of the Christian with Christ) and many others. These all derive from passages of the New Testament.[100]

Baptism

Baptism is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which a person is admitted to membership of the Church. Beliefs on baptism vary among denominations. Differences occur firstly on whether the act has any spiritual significance. Some, such as the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, as well as Lutherans and Anglicans, hold to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which affirms that baptism creates or strengthens a person's faith, and is intimately linked to salvation. Others view baptism as a purely symbolic act, an external public declaration of the inward change which has taken place in the person, but not as spiritually efficacious. Secondly, there are differences of opinion on the methodology of the act. These methods are: by *immersion*; if immersion is total, by *submersion*; by affusion (pouring); and by aspersion (sprinkling). Those who hold the first view may also adhere to the tradition of infant baptism;[102] the Orthodox Churches all practice infant baptism and always baptize by total immersion repeated three times in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[103][104] The Catholic Church also practices infant baptism,[105] usually by affusion, and utilizing the Trinitarian formula.[106]

The baptism of Jesus depicted by Almeida Júnior (1895)

Prayer

Jesus' teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount displays a distinct lack of interest in the external aspects of prayer. A concern with the techniques of prayer is condemned as "pagan", and instead a simple trust in God's fatherly goodness is encouraged.[Mat. 6:5–15] Elsewhere in the New Testament, this same freedom of access to God is also emphasized.[Phil. 4:6][Jam. 5:13–19] This confident position should be understood in light of Christian belief in the unique relationship between the believer and Christ through the indweling of the Holy Spirit.[107]

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

Intercessory prayer is prayer offered for the benefit of other people. There are many intercessory prayers recorded in the Bible, including prayers of the Apostle Peter on behalf of sick persons[Acts 9:40] and by prophets of the Old Testament in favor of other people.[1Ki 17:19–22] In the Epistle of James, no distinction is made between the intercessory prayer offered by ordinary believers and the prominent Old Testament prophet Elijah.[Jam 5:16–18] The effectiveness of prayer in Christianity derives from the power of God rather than the status of the one praying.[107]

The ancient church, in both Eastern and Western Christianity, developed a tradition of asking for the intercession of (deceased) saints, and this remains the practice of most Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, and some Anglican churches. Churches of the Protestant Reformation, however, rejected prayer to the saints, largely on the basis of the sole mediatorship of Christ.[108] The reformer Huldrych Zwingli admitted that he had offered prayers to the saints until his reading of the Bible convinced him that this was idolatrous.[109]

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."[110] The Book of Common Prayer in the Anglican tradition is a guide which provides a set order for church services, containing set prayers, scripture readings, and hymns or sung Psalms.

Scriptures

The Bible is the sacred book in Christianity.

Christianity, like other religions, has adherents whose beliefs and biblical interpretations vary. Christianity regards the biblical canon, the Old Testament and the New Testament, as the inspired word of God. The traditional view of inspiration is that God worked through human authors so that what they produced was what God wished to communicate. The Greek word referring to inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16 is *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed".[111]

Some believe that divine inspiration makes our present Bibles inerrant. Others claim inerrancy for the Bible in its original manuscripts, although none of those are extant. Still others maintain that only a particular translation is inerrant, such as the King James Version.[112][113][114] Another closely related view is biblical infallibility or limited inerrancy, which affirms that the Bible is free of error as a guide to salvation, but may include errors on matters such as history, geography, or science.

The books of the Bible accepted by the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches vary somewhat, with Jews accepting only the Hebrew Bible as canonical; however, there is substantial overlap. These variations are a reflection of the range of traditions, and of the councils that have convened on the subject. Every version of the Old Testament always includes the books of the Tanakh, the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The Catholic and Orthodox canons, in addition to the Tanakh, also include the deuterocanonical books as part of the Old Testament. These books appear in the Septuagint, but are regarded by Protestants to be apocryphal. However, they are considered to be important historical documents which help to inform the understanding of words, grammar, and

syntax used in the historical period of their conception. Some versions of the Bible include a separate Apocrypha section between the Old Testament and the New Testament.[115] The New Testament, originally written in Koine Greek, contains 27 books which are agreed upon by all churches.

Modern scholarship has raised many issues with the Bible. While the 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".[116] Much scholarship in the past several hundred years has gone into comparing different manuscripts in order to reconstruct the original text. Another issue is that several books are considered to be forgeries. The injunction that women "be silent and submissive" in 1 Timothy 2[117] is thought by many to be a forgery by a follower of Paul, a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 14,[118] 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.[116] 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",[119] contradict this verse.

A final issue with the Bible is the way in which books were selected for inclusion in the New Testament. Other gospels have now been recovered, such as those found near Nag Hammadi in 1945, and while some of these texts are quite different from what Christians have been used to, it should be understood that some of this newly recovered Gospel material is quite possibly contemporaneous with, or even earlier than, the New Testament Gospels. The core of the Gospel of Thomas, in particular, may date from as early as AD 50 (although some major scholars contest this early dating),[120] 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"),[121] is reminiscent of Luke 17:20–21[122][123]—and the Gospel of John, with a terminology and approach that is suggestive of what was later termed *Gnosticism*, has recently been seen as a possible response to the Gospel of Thomas, a text that is commonly labeled *proto-Gnostic*. Scholarship, then, is currently exploring the relationship in the Early Church between mystical speculation and experience on the one hand and the search for church order on the other, by analyzing new-found texts, by subjecting canonical texts to further scrutiny, and by an examination of the passage of New Testament texts to canonical status.

Catholic interpretation

In antiquity, two schools of exegesis developed in Alexandria and Antioch. The Alexandrian interpretation, exemplified by Origen, tended to read Scripture allegorically, while the Antiochene interpretation adhered to the literal sense, holding that other meanings (called *theoria*) could only be accepted if based on the literal meaning.[124]

Catholic theology distinguishes two senses of scripture: the literal and the spiritual.[125]

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

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

- The *allegorical* sense, which includes typology. An example would be the parting of the Red Sea being understood as a "type" (sign) of baptism.[1Cor 10:2]
- The *moral* sense, which understands the scripture to contain some ethical teaching.
- The *anagogical* sense, which applies to eschatology, eternity and the consummation of the world

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

- The injunction that all other senses of sacred scripture are based on the *literal*[126][127]
- That the historicity of the Gospels must be absolutely and constantly held[128]
- That scripture must be read within the "living Tradition of the whole Church"[129] and
- That "the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome".[130]

Protestant interpretation

Qualities of Scripture

Protestant Christians believe that the Bible is a self-sufficient revelation, the final authority on all Christian doctrine, and revealed all truth necessary for salvation. This concept is known as *sola scriptura*.[131] Protestants characteristically believe that ordinary believers may reach an adequate understanding of Scripture because Scripture itself is clear in its meaning (or "perspicuous"). Martin Luther believed that without God's help, Scripture would be "enveloped in darkness".[132] He advocated for "one definite and simple understanding of Scripture".[132] John Calvin wrote, "all who refuse not to follow the Holy Spirit as their guide, find in the Scripture a clear light".[133] Related to this is "efficacy", that Scripture is able to lead people to faith; and "sufficiency", that the Scriptures contain everything that one needs to know in order to obtain salvation and to live a Christian life.[134]

The Luther Bible (shown above) was an early translation of the Bible by a Protestant. Another early unauthorized translation was Wycliffe's Bible.

Original intended meaning of Scripture

Protestants stress the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture, the historical-grammatical method.[135] The historical-grammatical method or grammatico-historical method is an effort in Biblical hermeneutics to find the intended original meaning in the text.[136] 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.[137] 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."[138] 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.[136]

Some Protestant interpreters make use of typology.[139]

Ecclesiology

History

Early Christianity

Apostolic Age

Christianity developed during the 1st century CE as a Jewish Christian sect of Second Temple Judaism.[141][142] An early Jewish Christian community was founded in Jerusalem under the leadership of the Pillars of the Church, namely James the Just, the brother of the Lord, Saint Peter, and John. They had known Jesus, and, according to Paul, the arisen Christ had first appeared to James and Peter.

Jewish Christianity soon attracted Gentile God-fearers, posing a problem for its Jewish religious outlook, which insisted on close observance of the Jewish commands. Paul the Apostle solved this by insisting that salvation by faith in Christ, and participation in His death and resurrection, sufficed. At first he persecuted the early Christians, but after a conversion experience he preached to the gentiles, and is regarded as having had a formative effect on the emerging Christian identity as separate from Judaism. Eventually, his departure from Jewish customs would result in the establishment of Christianity as an independent religion.

Ante-Nicene period

This formative period was followed by the early bishops, whom Christians consider the successors of Christ's apostles. From the year 150, Christian teachers began to produce theological and apologetic works aimed at defending the faith. These authors are known as the Church Fathers, and the study of them is called patristics. Notable early Fathers include Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

According to the New Testament, Christians were from the beginning, subject to persecution by some Jewish and Roman religious authorities. This involved punishments, including death, for Christians such as Stephen[Acts 7:59] and James, son of Zebedee.[Acts 12:2] Further widespread persecution of the Church occurred under nine subsequent Roman emperors, most intensely under Decius and Diocletian.

Spread and acceptance in Roman Empire

Christianity spread to Aramaic-speaking peoples along the Mediterranean coast and also to the inland parts of the Roman Empire and beyond that into the Parthian Empire and the later Sasanian Empire, including Mesopotamia, which was dominated at different times and to varying extents by these empires.[143] The presence of Christianity in Africa began in the middle of the 1st century in Egypt and by the end of the 2nd century in the region around Carthage. Mark the Evangelist is claimed to have started the Church of Alexandria in about 43 CE; various later churches claim this as their own legacy, including the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.[144][145][146] Important Africans who influenced the early development of Christianity include Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian, Athanasius, and Augustine of Hippo.

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

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

The Monastery of St. Matthew, located atop Mount Alfaf in northern Iraq, is recognized as one of the oldest Christian monasteries in existence[140]

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

King Tiridates III made Christianity the state religion in Armenia between 301 and 314[81][147][148], thus Armenia became the first officially Christian state. It was not an entirely new religion in Armenia, having penetrated into the country from at least the third century, but it may have been present even earlier.[149]

Constantine I was exposed to Christianity in his youth, and throughout his life his support for the religion grew, culminating in baptism on his deathbed.[150] During his reign, state-sanctioned persecution of Christians was ended with the Edict of Toleration in 311 and the Edict of Milan in 313. At that point, Christianity was still a minority belief, comprising perhaps only five percent of the Roman population.[151] Influenced by his adviser Mardonius, Constantine's nephew Julian unsuccessfully tried to suppress Christianity.[152] On 27 February 380, Theodosius I, Gratian, and Valentinian II established Nicene Christianity as the State church of the Roman Empire.[153] As soon as it became connected to the state, Christianity grew wealthy; the Church solicited donations from the rich and could now own land.[154]

Constantine was also instrumental in the convocation of the First Council of Nicaea in 325, which sought to address Arianism and formulated the Nicene Creed, which is still used by the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglican Communion, and many Protestant churches.[35] Nicaea was the first of a series of ecumenical councils, which formally

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

defined critical elements of the theology of the Church, notably concerning Christology.[155] The Church of the East did not accept the third and following ecumenical councils and is still separate today by its successors (Assyrian Church of the East).

In terms of prosperity and cultural life, the Byzantine Empire was one of the peaks in Christian history and Christian civilization,[156] and Constantinople remained the leading city of the Christian world in size, wealth, and culture.[157] There was a renewed interest in classical Greek philosophy, as well as an increase in literary output in vernacular Greek.[158] Byzantine art and literature held a preeminent place in Europe, and the cultural impact of Byzantine art on the West during this period was enormous and of long-lasting significance.[159] The later rise of Islam in North Africa reduced the size and numbers of Christian congregations, leaving in large numbers only the Coptic Church in Egypt, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Horn of Africa and the Nubian Church in the Sudan (Nobatia, Makuria and Alodia).

Early Middle Ages

With the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in the West, the papacy became a political player, first visible in Pope Leo's diplomatic dealings with Huns and Vandals.[160] The church also entered into a long period of missionary activity and expansion among the various tribes. While Arianists instituted the death penalty for practicing pagans (see the Massacre of Verden, for example), what would later become Catholicism also spread among the Hungarians, the Germanic,[160] the Celtic, the Baltic and some Slavic peoples.

Around 500, St. Benedict set out his Monastic Rule, establishing a system of regulations for the foundation and running of monasteries.[160] Monasticism became a powerful force throughout Europe,[160] and gave rise to many early centers of learning, most famously in Ireland, Scotland, and Gaul, contributing to the Carolingian Renaissance of the 9th century.

In the 7th century, Muslims conquered Syria (including Jerusalem), North Africa, and Spain, converting some of the Christian population to Islam, and placing the rest under a separate legal status. Part of the Muslims' success was due to the exhaustion of the Byzantine Empire in its decades long conflict with Persia.[161] Beginning in the 8th century, with the rise of Carolingian leaders, the Papacy sought greater political support in the Frankish Kingdom.[162]

The Middle Ages brought about major changes within the church. Pope Gregory the Great dramatically reformed the ecclesiastical structure and administration.[163] In the early 8th century, iconoclasm became a divisive issue, when it was sponsored by the Byzantine emperors. The Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787) finally

pronounced in favor of icons.[164] In the early 10th century, Western Christian monasticism was further rejuvenated through the leadership of the great Benedictine monastery of Cluny.[165]

High and Late Middle Ages

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

In the West, from the 11th century onward, some older cathedral schools became universities (see, for example, University of Oxford, University of Paris and University of Bologna). Previously, higher education had been the domain of Christian cathedral schools or monastic schools (*Scholae monasticae*), led by monks and nuns. Evidence of such schools dates back to the 6th century CE.[166] These new universities expanded the curriculum to include academic programs for clerics, lawyers, civil servants, and physicians.[167] The university is generally regarded as an institution that has its origin in the Medieval Christian setting.[168]

Accompanying the rise of the "new towns" throughout Europe, mendicant orders were founded, bringing the consecrated religious life out of the monastery and into the new urban setting. The two principal mendicant movements were the Franciscans[169] and the Dominicans,[170] founded by St. Francis and St. Dominic, respectively. Both orders made significant contributions to the development of the great universities of Europe. Another new order was the Cistercians, whose large isolated monasteries spearheaded the settlement of former wilderness areas. In this period, church building and ecclesiastical architecture reached new heights, culminating in the orders of Romanesque and Gothic architecture and the building of the great European cathedrals.[171]

From 1095 under the pontificate of Urban II, the Crusades were launched.[172] These were a series of military campaigns in the Holy Land and elsewhere, initiated in response to pleas from the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I for aid against Turkish expansion. The Crusades ultimately failed to stifle Islamic aggression and even contributed to Christian enmity with the sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade.[173]

The Christian Church experienced internal conflict between the 7th and 13th centuries that resulted in a schism between the so-called Latin or Western Christian branch (the Catholic Church),[174] and an Eastern, largely Greek, branch (the Eastern Orthodox Church). The two sides disagreed on a number of administrative, liturgical and doctrinal issues, most notably papal primacy of jurisdiction.[175][176] The Second Council of Lyon (1274) and the Council of Florence (1439) attempted to reunite the churches, but in both cases, the Eastern Orthodox refused to implement the decisions, and the two principal churches remain in schism to the present day. However, the Catholic Church has achieved union with various smaller eastern churches.

In the thirteenth century, a new emphasis on Jesus' suffering, exemplified by the Franciscans' preaching, had the consequence of turning worshippers' attention towards Jews, on whom Christians had placed the blame for Jesus' death. Christianity's limited tolerance of Jews was not new—Augustine of Hippo said that Jews should not be allowed to enjoy the citizenship that Christians took for granted—but the growing antipathy towards Jews was a factor that led to the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, the first of many such expulsions in Europe.[177][178]

Beginning around 1184, following the crusade against Cathar heresy,[179] various institutions, broadly referred to as the Inquisition, were established with the aim of suppressing heresy and securing religious and doctrinal unity within Christianity through conversion and prosecution.[180]

Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation

The 15th-century Renaissance brought about a renewed interest in ancient and classical learning. During the Reformation, Martin Luther posted the *Ninety-five Theses* 1517 against the sale of indulgences.[181] Printed copies soon spread throughout Europe. In 1521 the Edict of Worms condemned and excommunicated Luther and his followers, resulting in the schism of the Western Christendom into several branches.[182]

Other reformers like Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Calvin, Knox, and Arminius further criticized Catholic teaching and worship. These challenges developed into the movement called Protestantism, which repudiated the primacy of the pope, the role of tradition, the seven sacraments, and other doctrines and practices.[181] The Reformation in England began in 1534, when King Henry VIII had himself declared head of the Church of England. Beginning in 1536, the monasteries throughout England, Wales and Ireland were dissolved.[183]

The *Ninety-five Theses*, which Luther published in 1517

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

Partly in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church engaged in a substantial process of reform and renewal, known as the Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reform.[187] The Council of Trent clarified and reasserted Catholic doctrine. During the following centuries, competition between Catholicism and Protestantism became deeply entangled with political struggles among European states.[188]

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

Michelangelo's 1498-99 *Pietà* in St. Peter's Basilica; the Catholic Church was among the patronages of the Renaissance[184][185][186]

Throughout Europe, the division caused by the Reformation led to outbreaks of religious violence and the establishment of separate state churches in Europe. Lutheranism spread into the northern, central, and eastern parts of present-day Germany, Livonia, and Scandinavia. Anglicanism was established in England in 1534. Calvinism and its varieties, such as Presbyterianism, were introduced in Scotland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Switzerland, and France. Arminianism gained followers in the Netherlands and Frisia. Ultimately, these differences led to the outbreak of conflicts in which religion played a key factor. The Thirty Years' War, the English Civil War, and the French Wars of Religion are prominent examples. These events intensified the Christian debate on persecution and toleration.[189]

Post-Enlightenment

In the era known as the Great Divergence, when in the West, the Age of Enlightenment and the scientific revolution brought about great societal changes, Christianity was confronted with various forms of skepticism and with certain modern political ideologies, such as versions of socialism and liberalism.[190] Events ranged from mere anti-clericalism to violent outbursts against Christianity, such as the dechristianization of France during the French Revolution,[191] the Spanish Civil War, and certain Marxist movements, especially the Russian Revolution and the persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union under state atheism.[192][193][194][195]

Especially pressing in Europe was the formation of nation states after the Napoleonic era. In all European countries, different Christian denominations found themselves in competition to greater or lesser extents with each other and with the state. Variables were the relative sizes of the denominations and the religious, political, and ideological orientation of the states. Urs Altermatt of the University of Fribourg, looking specifically at Catholicism in Europe, identifies four models for the European nations. In traditionally Catholic-majority countries such as Belgium, Spain, and Austria, to some extent, religious and national communities are more or less identical. Cultural symbiosis and separation are found in Poland, the Republic of Ireland, and Switzerland, all countries with competing denominations. Competition is found in Germany, the Netherlands, and again Switzerland, all countries with minority Catholic populations, which to a greater or lesser extent identified with the nation. Finally, separation between religion (again, specifically Catholicism) and the state is found to a great degree in France and Italy, countries where the state actively opposed itself to the authority of the Catholic Church.[196]

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

The combined factors of the formation of nation states and ultramontanism, especially in Germany and the Netherlands, but also in England to a much lesser extent,[197] often forced Catholic churches, organizations, and believers to choose between the national demands of the state and the authority of the Church, specifically the papacy. This conflict came to a head in the First Vatican Council, and in Germany would lead directly to the *Kulturkampf*, where liberals and Protestants under the leadership of Bismarck managed to severely restrict Catholic expression and organization.

Christian commitment in Europe dropped as modernity and secularism came into their own,[198] particularly in the Czech Republic and Estonia,[199] 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 the Southern Hemisphere in general, with the West no longer the chief standard bearer of Christianity. Approximately 7 to 10% of Arabs are Christians,[200] most prevalent in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

Demographics

With around 2.4 billion adherents,[201][202] split into three main branches of Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox, Christianity is the world's largest religion.[203] The Christian share of the world's population has stood at around 33% for the last hundred years, which means 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.[204] According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, within the next four decades, Christians will remain the world's largest religion; and by 2050, the Christian population is expected to exceed 3 billion.[205]:60

As a percentage of Christians, the Catholic Church and Orthodoxy (both Eastern and Oriental) are declining in parts of the world (though Catholicism is growing in Asia, in Africa, vibrant in Eastern Europe, etc.), while Protestants and other Christians are on the rise in the developing world.[206][207][208] The so-called *popular Protestantism*[note 4] is one of the fastest growing religious categories in the world.[209][210] Nevertheless, Catholicism will also continue to grow to 1.63 billion by 2050, according to Todd Johnson of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.[211] Africa alone, by 2015, will be home to 230 million African Catholics.[212] And if in 2018, the U.N. projects that Africa's population will reach 4.5 billion by 2100 (not 2 billion as predicted in 2004), Catholicism will indeed grow, as will other religious groups.[213]

Christianity is the predominant religion in Europe, the Americas, and Southern Africa. In Asia, it is the dominant religion in Georgia, Armenia, East Timor, and the Philippines.[214] However, it is declining in many areas including the Northern and Western United States,[215] Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), northern Europe (including Great Britain,[216] Scandinavia and other places), France, Germany, and the Canadian provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec, and parts of Asia (especially the Middle East, due to the Christian emigration,[217][218][219] South Korea,[220] Taiwan,[221] and Macau[222]).

A Christian procession in Brazil, the country with the largest Catholic population in the world

The Christian population is not decreasing in Brazil, the Southern United States,[223] and the province of Alberta, Canada,[224] but the percentage is decreasing. In countries such as Australia[225] and New Zealand,[226] the Christian population are declining in both numbers and percentage.

Despite the declining numbers, Christianity remains the dominant religion in the Western World, where 70% are Christians.[13] A 2011 Pew Research Center survey found that 76% of Europeans, 73% in Oceania and about 86% in the Americas (90% in Latin America and 77% in North America) identified themselves as Christians.[13][227][228][229] By 2010 about 157 countries and territories in the world had Christian majorities.[203]

Trinity Sunday in Russia; the Russian Orthodox Church has experienced a great revival since the fall of communism.

However, there are many charismatic movements that have become well established over large parts of the world, especially Africa, Latin America, and Asia.[230][231][232][233][234] Since 1900, primarily due to conversion, Protestantism has spread rapidly in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America.[235] From 1960 to 2000, the global growth of the number of reported Evangelical Protestants grew three times the world's population rate, and twice that of Islam.[236] A study conducted by St. Mary's University estimated about 10.2 million Muslim converts to Christianity in 2015.[237] The results also state that significant numbers of Muslims converts to Christianity in Afghanistan,[238] Albania,[237] Azerbaijan,[239][240] Algeria,[241][242] Belgium,[243] France,[242] Germany,[244] Iran,[245] India,[242] Indonesia,[246] Malaysia,[247] Morocco,[242][248] Russia,[242] the Netherlands,[249] Saudi Arabia,[250] Tunisia,[237] Turkey,[242][251][252][253] Kazakhstan,[254] Kyrgyzstan,[237] Kosovo,[255] the United States,[256] and Central Asia.[257][258] It is also reported that Christianity is popular among people of different backgrounds in India (mostly Hindus),[259][260] and Malaysia,[261] Mongolia,[262] Nigeria,[263] Vietnam,[264] Singapore,[265] Indonesia,[266][267] China,[268] Japan,[269] and South Korea.[270]

In most countries in the developed world, church attendance among people who continue to identify themselves as Christians has been falling over the last few decades.[271] Some sources view this simply as part of a drift away from traditional membership institutions,[272] while others link it to signs of a decline in belief in the importance of religion in general.[273] Europe's Christian population, though in decline, still constitutes the largest geographical component of the religion.[274] According to data from the 2012 European Social Survey, around a third of European Christians say they attend services once a month or more,[275] Conversely about more than two-thirds of Latin American Christians; according to the World Values Survey, about 90% of African Christians (in Ghana, Nigeria, Rwand], South Africa and Zimbabwe) said they attended church regularly.[275]

Christianity, in one form or another, is the sole state religion of the following nations: Argentina (Catholic),[276] Tuvalu (Reformed), Tonga (Methodist), Norway (Lutheran),[277][278][279] Costa Rica (Catholic),[280] the Kingdom of Denmark (Lutheran),[281] England (Anglican),[282] Georgia (Georgian Orthodox),[283] Greece (Greek Orthodox),[284] Iceland (Lutheran),[285] Liechtenstein (Catholic),[286] Malta (Catholic),[287] Monaco (Catholic),[288] and Vatican City (Catholic).[289]

There are numerous other countries, such as Cyprus, which although do not have an established church, still give official recognition and support to a specific Christian denomination.[290]

Demographics of major traditions within Christianity (Pew Research Center, 2010 data)[291]

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

Regional median ages of Christians compared with overall median ages (Pew Research Center, 2010 data)[292]

	Christian median age in region (years)	Regional median age (years)
World	30	--
Sub-Saharan Africa	19	18
Latin America-Caribbean	27	27
Asia-Pacific	28	29
Middle East-North Africa	29	24
North America	39	37
Europe	42	40
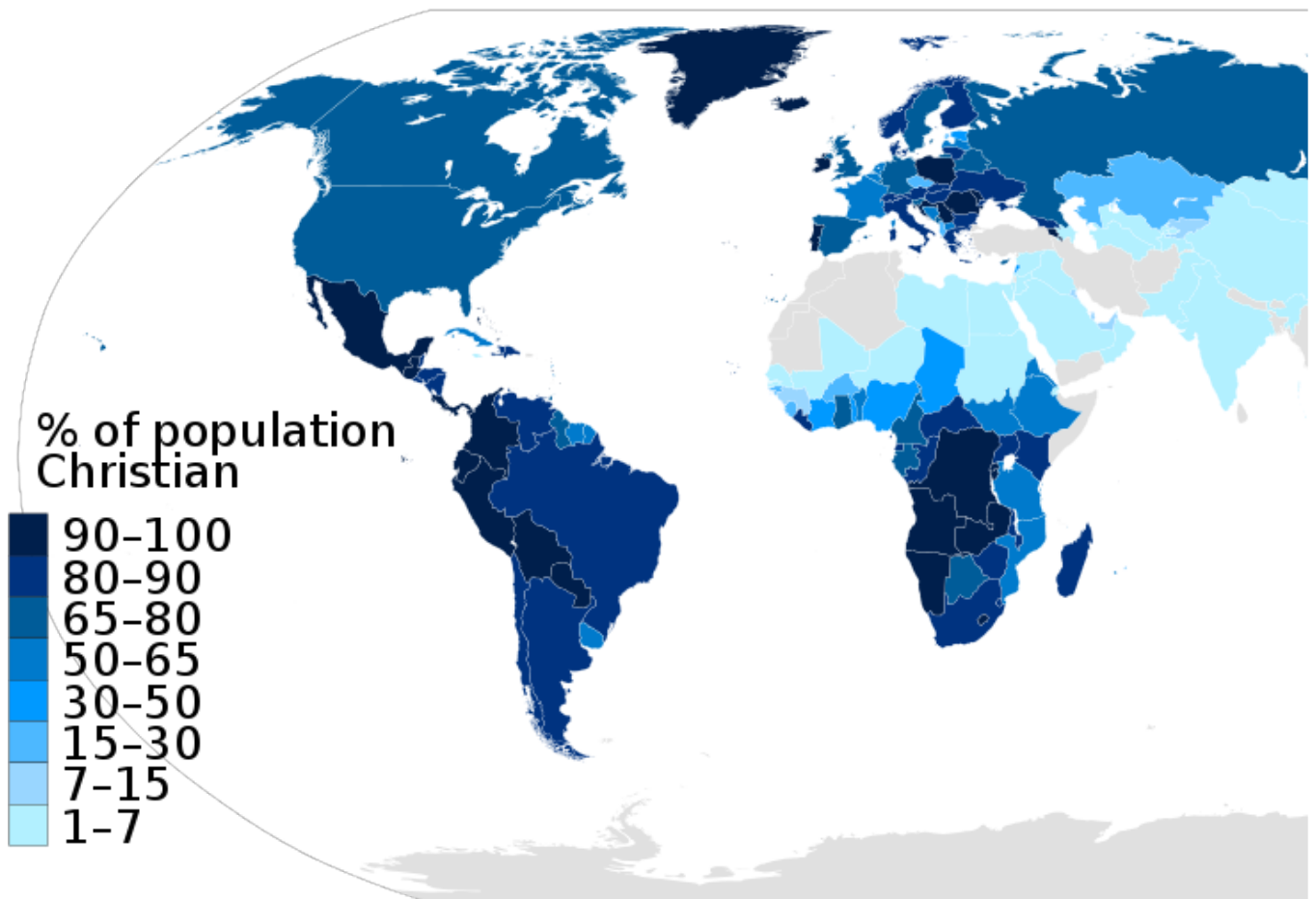
The global distribution of Christians: Countries colored a darker shade have a higher proportion of Christians.[293]

Countries with 50% or more Christians are colored purple while countries with 10% to 50% Christians are colored pink
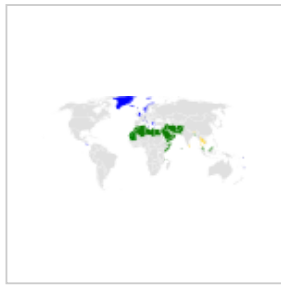
Nations with Christianity as their state religion are in blue

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

Distribution of Catholics
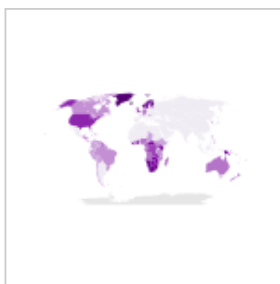
Distribution of Protestants

Distribution of Eastern Orthodox

Distribution of Oriental Orthodox

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

Denominations

Major denominational families in Christianity:
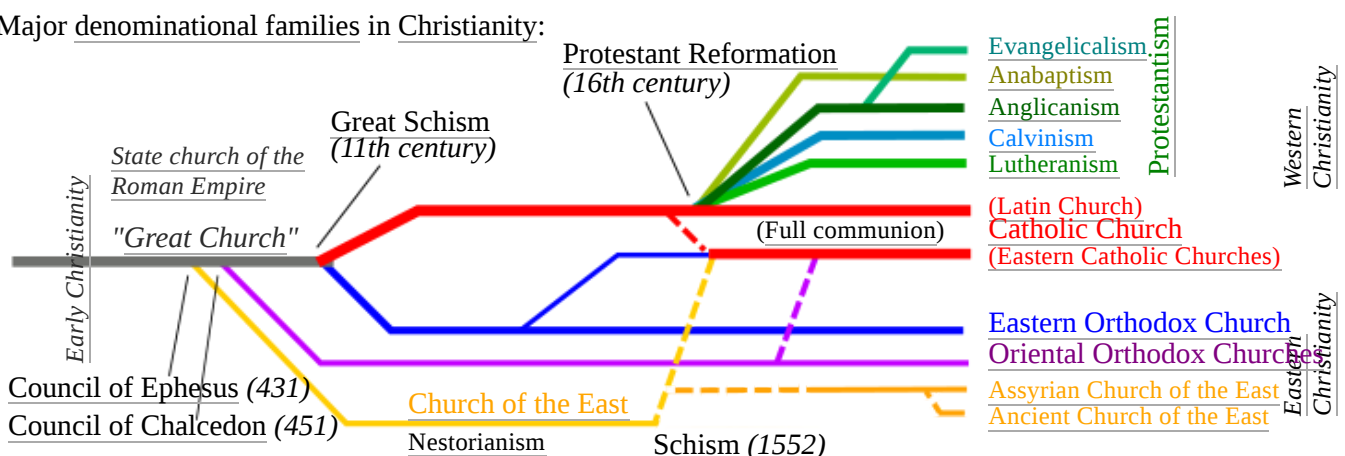
Not shown: non-Nicene, nontrinitarian, and some restorationist denominations

The four primary divisions of Christianity are the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodoxy, and Protestantism.[39]:14[294] A broader distinction that is sometimes drawn is between Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity, which has its origins in the East–West Schism (Great Schism) of the 11th

century. However, there are other present[295] and historical[296] Christian groups that do not fit neatly into one of these primary categories.

There is a diversity of doctrines and liturgical practices among groups calling themselves Christian. These groups may vary ecclesiologically in their views on a classification of Christian denominations.[297] The Nicene Creed (325), however, is typically accepted as authoritative by most Christians, including the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and major Protestant, including Anglican, denominations.[298]

By reason of Protestant ecclesiology, ever since its emergence in the 16th century, Protestantism comprises the widest diversity of groupings and practices. In addition to the Lutheran and Reformed (or Calvinist) branches of the Reformation, Anglicanism appeared after the English Reformation. The Anabaptist tradition was largely ostracized by the other Protestant parties at the time, but has achieved a measure of affirmation in contemporary history. Adventist, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and other Protestant confessions arose in the following centuries.

Catholic Church

The Catholic Church consists of those particular churches, headed by bishops, in communion with the pope, the bishop of Rome, as its highest authority in matters of faith, morality, and Church governance.[299][300] Like Eastern Orthodoxy, the Catholic Church, through apostolic succession, traces its origins to the Christian community founded by Jesus Christ.[301][302] Catholics maintain that the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" founded by Jesus subsists fully in the Catholic Church, but also acknowledges other Christian churches and communities[303][304] and works towards reconciliation among all Christians.[303] The Catholic faith is detailed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.[305][306]

Pope Francis, the current leader of the Catholic Church

The 2,834 sees[307] are grouped into 24 particular autonomous Churches (the largest of which being the Latin Church), each with its own distinct traditions regarding the liturgy and the administering of sacraments.[308] With more than 1.1 billion baptized members, the Catholic Church is the largest Christian church and represents over half of all Christians as well as one sixth of the world's population.[309][310][311]

Eastern Orthodox Church

The Eastern Orthodox Church consists of those churches in communion with the patriarchal sees of the East, such as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.[312] Like the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church also traces its heritage to the foundation of Christianity through apostolic succession and has an episcopal structure, though the autonomy of its component parts is emphasized, and most of them are national churches.

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

A number of conflicts with Western Christianity over questions of doctrine and authority culminated in the Great Schism. Eastern Orthodoxy is the second largest single denomination in Christianity, with an estimated 225–300 million adherents.[13][310][313]

Oriental Orthodoxy

The Oriental Orthodox Churches (also called "Old Oriental" churches) are those eastern churches that recognize the first three ecumenical councils—Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus—but reject the dogmatic definitions of the Council of Chalcedon and instead espouse a Miaphysite christology.

The Oriental Orthodox communion consists of six groups: Syriac Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Eritrean Orthodox, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (India), and Armenian Apostolic churches.[314] These six churches, while being in communion with each other, are completely independent hierarchically.[315] These churches are generally not in communion with Eastern Orthodox Church, with whom they are in dialogue for erecting a communion.[316]

Assyrian Church of the East

The Assyrian Church of the East, with an unbroken patriarchate established in the 17th century, is an independent Eastern Christian denomination which claims continuity from the Church of the East—in parallel to the Catholic patriarchate established in the 16th century that evolved into the Chaldean Catholic Church, an Eastern Catholic church in full communion with the Pope. It is an Eastern Christian church that follows the traditional christology and ecclesiology of the historical Church of the East. Largely aniconic and not in communion with any other church, it belongs to the eastern branch of Syriac Christianity, and uses the East Syriac Rite in its liturgy.[317]

A 6th-century Nestorian church, St. John the Arab, in the Assyrian village of Geramon in Hakkari, southeastern Turkey

Its main spoken language is Syriac, a dialect of Eastern Aramaic, and the majority of its adherents are ethnic Assyrians. It is officially headquartered in the city of Erbil in northern Iraqi Kurdistan, and its original area also spreads into south-eastern Turkey and north-western Iran, corresponding to ancient Assyria. Its hierarchy is composed of metropolitan bishops and diocesan bishops, while lower clergy consists of priests and deacons, who serve in dioceses (eparchies) and parishes throughout the Middle East, India, North America, Oceania, and Europe (including the Caucasus and Russia).[318]

The Ancient Church of the East distinguished itself from the Assyrian Church of the East in 1964. It is one of the Assyrian churches that claim continuity with the historical Patriarchate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon—the Church of the East, one of the oldest Christian churches in Mesopotamia.[319]

Protestantism

In 1521, the Edict of Worms condemned Martin Luther and officially banned citizens of the Holy Roman Empire from defending or propagating his ideas.[320] This split within the Roman Catholic church is now called the Reformation. Prominent Reformers included Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin. The 1529 Protestation at Speyer against being excommunicated gave this party the name Protestantism. Luther's primary theological heirs are known as Lutherans. Zwingli and Calvin's heirs are far broader denominationally, and are referred to as the Reformed tradition.[321]

The Anglican churches descended from the Church of England and organized in the Anglican Communion. Some, but not all Anglicans consider themselves both Protestant and Catholic.[322][323]

Since the Anglican, Lutheran, and the Reformed branches of Protestantism originated for the most part in cooperation with the government, these movements are termed the "Magisterial Reformation". On the other hand, groups such as the Anabaptists, who often do not consider themselves to be Protestant, originated in the Radical Reformation, which though sometimes protected under *Acts of Toleration*, do not trace their history back to any

state church. They are further distinguished by their rejection of infant baptism; they believe in baptism only of adult believers—credobaptism (Anabaptists include the Amish, Apostolic, Bruderhof, Mennonites, Hutterites and Schwarzenau Brethren/German Baptist groups.)[324][325][326]

The term *Protestant* also refers to any churches which formed later, with either the Magisterial or Radical traditions. In the 18th century, for example, Methodism grew out of Anglican minister John Wesley's evangelical and revival movement.[327] Several Pentecostal and non-denominational churches, which emphasize the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, in turn grew out of Methodism.[328] Because Methodists, Pentecostals and other evangelicals stress "accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior",[329] which comes from Wesley's emphasis of the New Birth,[330] they often refer to themselves as being born-again.[331][332]

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 Catholicism in number of followers, although the Eastern Orthodox Church is larger than any single Protestant denomination.[310] Often that number is put at more than 800 million, corresponding to nearly 40% of world's Christians.[206] The majority of Protestants are members of just a handful of denominational families, i.e. Adventists, Anglicans, Baptists, Reformed (Calvinists),[333] Lutherans, Methodists, and Pentecostals.[206] Nondenominational, evangelical, charismatic, neo-charismatic, independent, and other churches are on the rise, and constitute a significant part of Protestant Christianity.[334]

Some groups of individuals who hold basic Protestant tenets identify themselves simply as "Christians" or "born-again Christians". They typically distance themselves from the confessionalism and creedalism of other Christian communities[335] by calling themselves "non-denominational" or "evangelical". Often founded by individual pastors, they have little affiliation with historic denominations.[336]
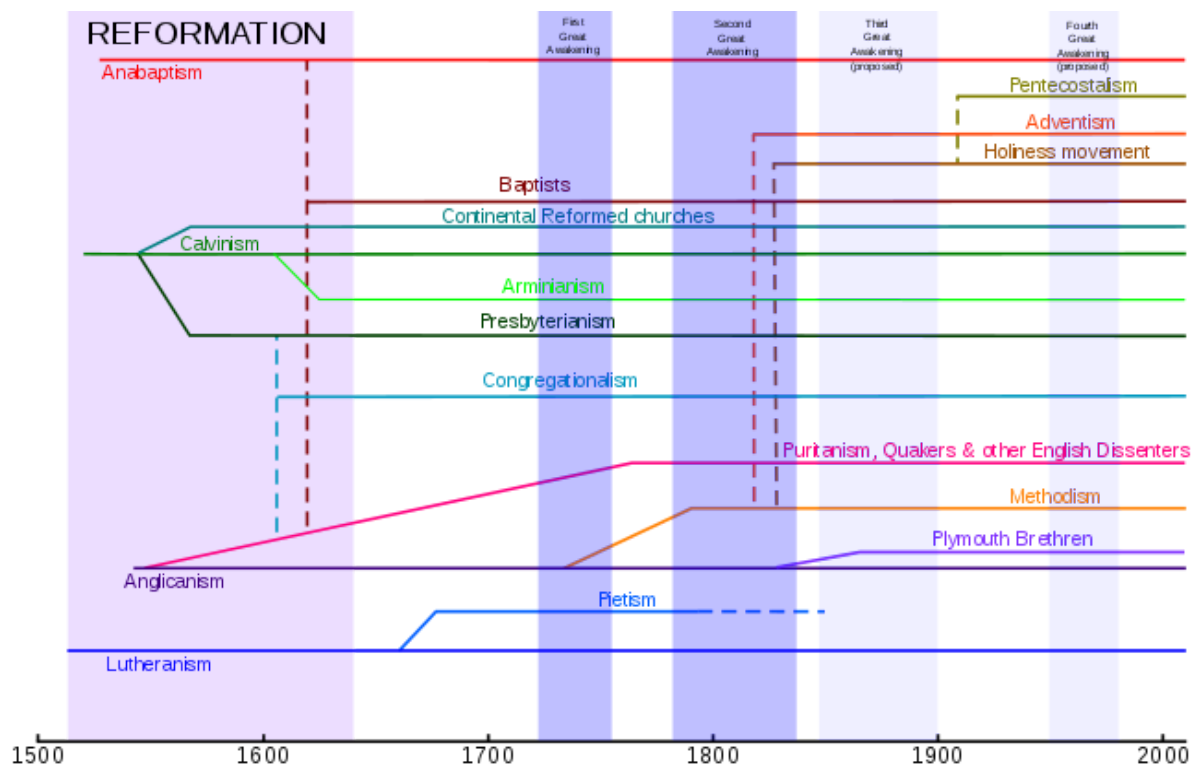
Historical chart of the main Protestant branches
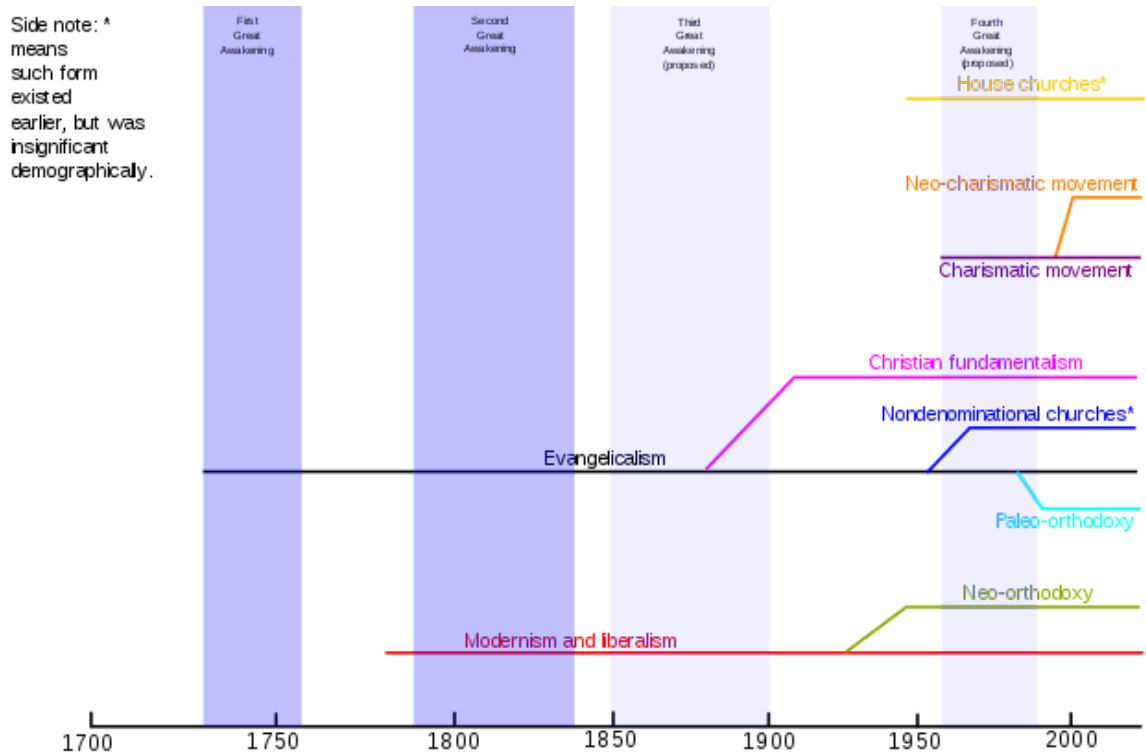
Links between interdenominational movements and other developments within Protestantism

Restorationism

The Second Great Awakening, a period of religious revival that occurred in the United States during the early 1800s, saw the development of a number of unrelated churches. They generally saw themselves as restoring the original church of Jesus Christ rather than reforming one of the existing churches.[337] 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.[338] In Asia, Iglesia ni Cristo is a known restorationist religion that was established during the early 1900s.

Some of the churches originating during this period are historically connected to early 19th-century camp meetings in the Midwest and upstate New York. One of the largest churches produced from the movement is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[339] American Millennialism and Adventism, which arose from Evangelical Protestantism, influenced the Jehovah's Witnesses movement and, as a reaction specifically to William Miller, the Seventh-day Adventists. Others, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Christian Church in Canada,[340][341] Churches of Christ, and the Christian churches and churches of Christ, have their roots in the contemporaneous Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, which was centered in Kentucky and Tennessee. Other groups originating in this time period include the Christadelphians and the previously mentioned Latter Day Saints movement. While the churches originating in the Second Great Awakening have some superficial similarities, their doctrine and practices vary significantly.

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

Other

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

Spiritual Christians, such as the Doukhobor and Molokan, broke from the Russian Orthodox Church and maintain close association with Mennonites and Quakers due to similar religious practices; all of these groups are furthermore collectively considered to be peace churches due to their belief in pacifism.[342][343]

Messianic Judaism (or the Messianic Movement) is the name of a Christian movement comprising a number of streams, whose members may consider themselves Jewish. The movement originated in the 1960s and 1970s, and it blends elements of religious Jewish practice with evangelical Christianity. Messianic Judaism affirms Christian creeds such as the messiahship and divinity of "Yeshua" (the Hebrew name of Jesus) and the Triune Nature of God, while also adhering to some Jewish dietary laws and customs.[344]

Esoteric Christians regard Christianity as a mystery religion,[345][346] and profess the existence and possession of certain esoteric doctrines or practices,[347][348] hidden from the public but accessible only to a narrow circle of "enlightened", "initiated", or highly educated people.[349][350] Some of the esoteric Christian institutions include the Rosicrucian Fellowship, the Anthroposophical Society, and Martinism.

Influence on western culture

Western culture, throughout most of its history, has been nearly equivalent to Christian culture, and a large portion of the population of the Western Hemisphere can be described as cultural Christians. The notion of "Europe" and the "Western World" has been intimately connected with the concept of "Christianity and Christendom". Many even attribute Christianity for being the link that created a unified European identity.[351]

Though Western culture contained several polytheistic religions during its early years under the Greek and Roman empires, as the centralized Roman power waned, the dominance of the Catholic Church was the only consistent force in Western Europe.[352] Until the Age of Enlightenment,[353] Christian culture guided the course of philosophy, literature, art, music and science.[352][354] Christian disciplines of the respective arts have subsequently developed into Christian philosophy, Christian art, Christian music, Christian literature, etc.

Set of pictures showcasing Christian culture and famous Christian leaders

Christianity has had a significant impact on education, as the church created the bases of the Western system of education,[355] and was the sponsor of founding universities in the Western world, as the university is generally regarded as an institution that has its origin in the Medieval Christian setting.[168] Historically, Christianity has often been a patron of science and medicine. It has been prolific in the foundation of schools, universities, and hospitals, and many Catholic clergy;[356] Jesuits in particular,[357][358] have been active in the sciences throughout history and have made significant contributions to the development of science.[359] Protestantism also has had an important influence on science. According to the Merton Thesis, there was a positive correlation between the rise of English Puritanism and German Pietism on the one hand, and early experimental science on the other.[360] The civilizing influence of Christianity includes social welfare,[361] founding hospitals,[362] economics (as the Protestant work ethic),[363][364] politics,[365] architecture,[366] literature,[367] personal hygiene,[368][369] and family life.[370]

Eastern Christians (particularly Nestorian Christians) contributed to the Arab Islamic civilization during the reign of the Ummayad and the Abbasid, by translating works of Greek philosophers to Syriac and afterwards, to Arabic.[371][372][373] They also excelled in philosophy, science, theology, and medicine.[374][375][376] Also, many scholars of the House of Wisdom were of Christian background.[377]

Christians have made a myriad of contributions to human progress in a broad and diverse range of fields,[378] including philosophy,[379] science and technology,[356][380][381][382][383] fine arts and architecture,[384] politics, literatures, music,[385] and business.[386] According to *100 Years of Nobel Prizes* a review of the Nobel Prizes award between 1901 and 2000 reveals that (65%) of Nobel Prizes Laureates, have identified Christianity in its various forms as their religious preference.[387]

Postchristianity[388] is the term for the decline of Christianity, particularly in Europe, Canada, Australia, and to a minor degree the Southern Cone, in the 20th and 21st centuries, considered in terms of postmodernism. It refers to the loss of Christianity's monopoly on values and world view in historically Christian societies.

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

Ecumenism

Ecumenical worship service at the monastery of Taizé in France

Christian groups and denominations have long expressed ideals of being reconciled, and in the 20th century, Christian ecumenism advanced in two ways.[389] One way was greater cooperation between groups, such as the World Evangelical Alliance founded in 1846 in London or the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of Protestants in 1910, the Justice, Peace and Creation Commission of the World Council of Churches founded in 1948 by Protestant and Orthodox churches, and similar national councils like the National Council of Churches in Australia, which includes Catholics.[389]

The other way was an institutional union with united churches, a practice that can be traced back to unions between Lutherans and Calvinists in early 19th-century Germany. Congregationalist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches united in 1925 to form the United Church of Canada,[390] and in 1977 to form the Uniting Church in Australia. The Church of South India was formed in 1947 by the union of Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian churches.[391]

The ecumenical, monastic Taizé Community is notable for being composed of more than one hundred brothers from Protestant and Catholic traditions.[392] The community emphasizes the reconciliation of all denominations and its main church, located in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, France, is named the "Church of Reconciliation".[392] The community is internationally known, attracting over 100,000 young pilgrims annually.[393]

Steps towards reconciliation on a global level were taken in 1965 by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, mutually revoking the excommunications that marked their Great Schism in 1054;[394] the Anglican Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) working towards full communion between those churches since 1970;[395] and some Lutheran and Catholic churches signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 to address conflicts at the root of the Protestant Reformation. In 2006, the World Methodist Council, representing all Methodist denominations, adopted the declaration.[396]

Criticism, persecution, and apologetics

Criticism

Criticism of Christianity and Christians goes back to the Apostolic Age, with the New Testament recording friction between the followers of Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes (e.g. Matthew 15:1–20 (https://www.biblica.com/bible/?osis=niv:Matthew.15:1–15:20) and Mark 7:1–23 (https://www.biblica.com/bible/?osis=niv:Mark.7:1–7:23)).[397] 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.[398] Additionally, a sacrifice to remove sins in advance, for everyone or as a human being, did not fit to the Jewish sacrifice ritual; furthermore, God is said to judge people on their deeds instead of their beliefs.[399][400] One of the first comprehensive attacks on Christianity came from the Greek philosopher Celsus, who wrote *The True Word*, a polemic criticizing Christians as being unprofitable members of society.[401][402][403] In response, the church father Origen published his treatise *Contra Celsum*, or *Against Celsus*, a seminal work of Christian apologetics, which systematically addressed Celsus's criticisms and helped bring Christianity a level of academic respectability.[404][403]

A copy of the *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas, a famous Christian apologetic work

By the 3rd century, criticism of Christianity had mounted, partly as a defense against it. Wild rumors about Christians were widely circulated, claiming that they were atheists and that, as part of their rituals, they devoured human infants and engaged in incestuous orgies.[405][406] The Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry wrote the fifteen-volume *Adversus Christianos* as a comprehensive attack on Christianity, in part building on the teachings of Plotinus.[407][408]

By the 12th century, the Mishneh Torah (i.e., Rabbi Moses Maimonides) was criticizing Christianity on the grounds of idol worship, in that Christians attributed divinity to Jesus, who had a physical body.[409] In the 19th century, Nietzsche began to write a series of polemics on the "unnatural" teachings of Christianity (e.g. sexual abstinence), and continued his criticism of Christianity to the end of his life.[410] In the 20th century, the philosopher Bertrand Russell expressed his criticism of Christianity in *Why I Am Not a Christian*, formulating his rejection of Christianity in the setting of logical arguments.[411]

Criticism of Christianity continues to date, e.g. Jewish and Muslim theologians criticize the doctrine of the Trinity held by most Christians, stating that this doctrine in effect assumes that there are three gods, running against the basic tenet of monotheism.[412] New Testament scholar Robert M. Price has outlined the possibility that some Bible stories are based partly on myth in *The Christ Myth Theory and its problems*.[413]

Persecution

In 2017, Open Doors estimated approximately 215 million Christians are subjected annually to "high, very high, or extreme persecution"[414] with North Korea considered the most hazardous nation for Christians.[415]

In 2019, a report[416][417] commissioned by the United Kingdom's Secretary of State of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to investigate global persecution of Christians found persecution has increased, and is highest in the Middle East, North Africa, India, China, North Korea, and Latin America, among others,[16] and that it is global and not limited to Islamic states.[417] This investigation found that approximately 80% of persecuted believers worldwide are Christians.[17]

Apologetics

Christian apologetics aims to present a rational basis for Christianity. The word "apologetic" (Greek: ἀπολογητικός *apologētikos*) comes from the Greek verb ἀπολογέομαι *apologeomai*, meaning "(I) speak in defense of".[418] Christian apologetics has taken many forms over the centuries, starting with Paul the Apostle.

The philosopher Thomas Aquinas presented five arguments for God's existence in the *Summa Theologica*, while his *Summa contra Gentiles* was a major apologetic work.[419][420] Another famous apologist, G. K. Chesterton, wrote in the early twentieth century about the benefits of religion and, specifically, Christianity. Famous for his use of paradox, Chesterton explained that while Christianity had the most mysteries, it was the most practical religion.[421][422] He pointed to the advance of Christian civilizations as proof of its practicality.[423] The physicist and priest John Polkinghorne, in his *Questions of Truth*, discusses the subject of religion and science, a topic that other Christian apologists such as Ravi Zacharias, John Lennox, and William Lane Craig have engaged, with the latter two men opining that the inflationary Big Bang model is evidence for the existence of God.[424]

See also

- Abrahamic religions
- Christianity and Judaism
- Christianity and politics
- Christian mythology
- Criticism of Christianity
- Judaism
- List of schisms in Christianity
- One true church
- Outline of Christianity

Notes

1. It appears in the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 9:2, Acts 19:9 and Acts 19:23). Some English translations of the New Testament capitalize 'the Way' (e.g. the New King James Version and the English Standard Version), indicating that this was how 'the new religion seemed then to be designated'[19] whereas others treat the phrase as indicative—'the way',[20] 'that way'[21] or 'the way of the Lord'.[22] The Syriac version reads, "the way of God" and the Vulgate Latin version, "the way of the Lord".[23]
2. The Latin equivalent, from which English *trinity* is derived,[71] is *trinitas*[72] though Latin also borrowed Greek *trias* verbatim.[73]
3. *Iesous Christos Theou **H**yios Soter* would be a more complete transliteration; in Greek though, the daseia or spiritus asper was not—commonly—marked in the majuscule script of the time.
4. A flexible term; defined as all forms of Protestantism with the notable exception of the historical denominations deriving directly from the Protestant Reformation.

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> Hence all the power of magic became dissolved; and every bond of wickedness was destroyed, men's ignorance was taken away, and the old kingdom abolished God Himself appearing in the form of a man, for the renewal of eternal life.
>
> — St. Ignatius of Antioch in *Letter to the Ephesians*, ch.4, shorter version, Roberts-Donaldson translation

> We have also as a Physician the Lord our God Jesus the Christ the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For 'the Word was made flesh.' Being incorporeal, He was in the body; being impassible, He was in a passable body; being immortal, He was in a mortal body; being life, He became subject to corruption, that He might free our souls from death and corruption, and heal them, and might restore them to health, when they were diseased with ungodliness and wicked lusts
>
> — St. Ignatius of Antioch in *Letter to the Ephesians*, ch.7, shorter version, Roberts-Donaldson translation

> The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: ...one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one,' and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess; to him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all...
>
> — St. Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*, ch.X, v.I, Donaldson, Sir James (1950), *Ante Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., ISBN 978-0802880871

> For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water
>
> — Justin Martyr in *First Apology*, ch. LXI, Donaldson, Sir James (1950), *Ante Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, ISBN 978-0802880871

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