



# Christianity

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# Christianity



- Christianity (/krɪstʃi'æniːti/) is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus. It is the world's largest and most widespread religion with roughly 2.4 billion followers, comprising around 31.2% of the world population.
- Its adherents, known as Christians, are estimated to make up a majority of the population in 157 countries and territories. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, whose coming as the Messiah was prophesied in the Hebrew Bible (called the Old Testament in Christianity) and chronicled in the New Testament.

# Christianity



- Christianity remains culturally diverse in its Western and Eastern branches, and doctrinally diverse concerning justification and the nature of salvation, ecclesiology, ordination, and Christology.
- The creeds of various Christian denominations 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 humankind; and referred to as the gospel, meaning the "good news".
- The four canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John describe Jesus's life and teachings, with the Old Testament as the gospels' respected background.

# Christianity

- Christianity began in the 1st century after the birth of Jesus as a Judaic sect with Hellenistic influence, in the Roman province of Judea. The disciples of Jesus spread their faith around the Eastern Mediterranean area, despite significant persecution. The inclusion of Gentiles led Christianity to slowly separate from Judaism (2nd century).
- Emperor Constantine I 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 religion of the Roman Empire (380).
- The Church of the East and Oriental Orthodoxy both split over differences in Christology (5th century), while the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church separated in the East–West Schism (1054).
- Protestantism split into numerous denominations from the Catholic Church in the Reformation era (16th century).
- Following the Age of Discovery (15th–17th century), Christianity expanded throughout the world via missionary work, extensive trade and colonialism. Christianity played a prominent role in the development of Western civilization, particularly in Europe from late antiquity and the Middle Ages.



# Christianity

- The six major branches of Christianity are
  - Roman Catholicism (1.3 billion people),
  - Protestantism (900 million),
  - Eastern Orthodoxy (220 million),
  - Oriental Orthodoxy (60 million),
  - Restorationism (35 million), and
  - the Church of the East (600 thousand).
- Smaller church communities number in the thousands despite efforts toward unity (ecumenism).
- In the West, Christianity remains the dominant religion even with a decline in adherence, with about 70% of that population identifying as Christian.
- Christianity is growing in Africa and Asia, the world's most populous continents. Christians remain greatly persecuted in many regions of the world, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, East Asia, and South Asia.



# Etymology



- Early Jewish Christians referred to themselves as 'The Way' (Koinē Greek: τῆς ὁδοῦ, romanized: tēs hodoû), probably coming from Isaiah 40:3, "prepare the way of the Lord".
- According to Acts 11:26, the term "Christian" (Χρῑστιᾱνός, Khrīstiānós), meaning "followers of Christ" in reference to Jesus's disciples, was first used in the city of Antioch by the non-Jewish inhabitants there.
- The earliest recorded use of the term "Christianity/Christianism" (Χρῑστιᾱνισμός, Khrīstiānismós) was by Ignatius of Antioch around 100 AD.
- The name Jesus comes from Greek: Ἰησοῦς Iēsous, likely from Hebrew/Aramaic: יֵשׁוּעַ Yēšūaʿ.

# Creed

- 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. "Jesus is Lord" is the earliest creed of Christianity and continues to be used, as with the World Council of Churches.
- 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.



# Nicene Creed



- 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. Its points include:
  - Belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit
  - The death, descent into hell, resurrection and ascension of Christ
  - The holiness of the Church and the communion of saints
  - Christ's second coming, the Day of Judgement and salvation of the faithful
- The Nicene Creed was formulated, largely in response to Arianism, at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in 325 and 381 respectively, and ratified as the universal creed of Christendom by the First Council of Ephesus in 431 CE



# Jesus of Nazareth



- 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's 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.
- 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, ascended to heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will ultimately return 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.

# Jesus of Nazareth



- 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's 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's 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. Among Christian beliefs, the death and resurrection of Jesus are two core events on which much of Christian doctrine and theology is based.[39] 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.
- The New Testament mentions several post-resurrection appearances of Jesus on different occasions to his twelve apostles and disciples, including "more than five hundred brethren at once", before Jesus's ascension to heaven.
- Jesus's death and resurrection are commemorated by Christians in all worship services, with special emphasis during Holy Week, which includes Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

# Death and Resurrection



- 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.
- Christian churches accept and teach the New Testament account of the resurrection of Jesus with very few exceptions. Some modern scholars use the belief of Jesus's followers in the resurrection as a point of departure for establishing the continuity of the historical Jesus and the proclamation of the early church. Some liberal Christians do not accept a literal bodily resurrection, seeing the story as richly symbolic and spiritually nourishing myth. Arguments over death and resurrection claims occur at many religious debates and interfaith dialogues.
- 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".

# 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. 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"[52][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".
- 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. In Protestant theology, Jesus' death is regarded as a substitutionary penalty carried by Jesus, for the debt that has to be paid by humankind when it broke God's moral law.
- 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. In contrast Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Arminian Protestants believe that the exercise of free will is necessary to have faith in Jesus



# Trinity

- Trinity refers to the teaching that the one God[60] 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, although there is no single term in use in Scripture to denote the unified Godhead.
- 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".
- 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.
- However, traditionally there is a belief that it was the Son who appeared in the Old Testament because, for example, when the Trinity is depicted in art, the Son typically has the distinctive appearance, a cruciform halo identifying Christ, and in depictions of the Garden of Eden, this looks forward to an Incarnation yet to occur. In some Early Christian sarcophagi, the Logos is distinguished with a beard, "which allows him to appear ancient, even pre-existent



# Trinity



- The Trinity is an essential doctrine of mainstream Christianity. From earlier than the times of the Nicene Creed (325) Christianity advocated 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.
- 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 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". The term may have been in use before this time; its Latin equivalent, appears afterwards with an explicit reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in Tertullian. In the following century, the word was in general use. It is found in many passages of Origen.

# 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.
- 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.



# 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, Orthodox and most Protestants) in a judgment particular to the individual soul upon physical death.
- In the Catholic branch of Christianity, 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. Those who have attained this goal are called saints (Latin sanctus, "holy").
- 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.[]

# Practices



- Depending on the specific denomination of Christianity, practices may include baptism, the 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 who lead regular communal worship services.
- Christian rites, rituals, and ceremonies are not celebrated in one single sacred language. Many ritualistic Christian churches make a distinction between sacred language, liturgical language and vernacular language.
- The three important languages in the early Christian era were: Latin, Greek and Syria

# Sacraments or Ordinances



- 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.
- 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; however, the majority of Christians also recognize five additional sacraments: Confirmation (Chrismation in the Eastern tradition), Holy Orders (or ordination), Penance (or Confession), Anointing of the Sick, and Matrimony (see Christian views on marriage).

# Sacraments and Ordances

- 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, some Lutherans and Anglicans. Most other denominations and traditions typically affirm only Baptism and Eucharist as sacraments, while some Protestant groups, such as the Quakers, reject sacramental theology. Certain denominations of Christianity, such as Anabaptists, use the term "ordinances" to refer to rites instituted by Jesus for Christians to observe. Seven ordinances have been taught in many Conservative Mennonite Anabaptist churches, which include "baptism, communion, footwashing, marriage, anointing with oil, the holy kiss, and the prayer covering".
- 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.
- The Schwarzenau Brethren Anabaptist churches, such as the Dunkard Brethren Church, observe the agape feast (lovefeast), a rite also observed by Moravian Church and Methodist Churches



# Symbols

- Most Christian denominations have not generally practiced aniconism, the avoidance or prohibition of devotional images, even if early Jewish Christians, 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. 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. Although the cross was known to the early Christians, the crucifix did not appear in use until the 5th century.
- 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. Its popularity seemingly arose from the Greek word *ichthys* (fish) forming an acrostic for the Greek phrase *Iesous Christos Theou Yios Soter* (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ), (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior), a concise summary of Christian faith.
- Other major Christian symbols include the chi-rho monogram, the dove and olive branch (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.



# 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. Baptists and Plymouth Brethren 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 (or mode) of the act. These modes 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; 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.
- The Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church also practice infant baptism, usually by affusion, and using the Trinitarian formula. Anabaptist Christians practice believer's baptism, in which an adult chooses to receive the ordinance after making a decision to follow Jesus. Anabaptist denominations such as the Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites use pouring as the mode to administer believer's baptism, whereas Anabaptists of the Schwarzenau Brethren and River Brethren traditions baptize by immersion.

# Prayer



- In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer, which has been seen as a model for Christian prayer. The injunction for Christians to pray the Lord's prayer thrice daily was given in the Didache and came to be recited by Christians at 9 am, 12 pm, and 3 pm.
- In the second century Apostolic Tradition, Hippolytus instructed Christians to pray at seven fixed prayer times: "on rising, at the lighting of the evening lamp, at bedtime, at midnight" and "the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day, being hours associated with Christ's Passion". Prayer positions, including kneeling, standing, and prostrations have been used for these seven fixed prayer times since the days of the early Church.
- Breviaries such as the Shehimo and Agpeya are used by Oriental Orthodox Christians to pray these canonical hours while facing in the eastward direction of prayer.

# Scriptures

- 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".
- Some believe that divine inspiration makes 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.
- 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.





# 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.
- Catholic theology distinguishes two senses of scripture: the literal and the spiritual.
- The literal sense of understanding scripture is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture. The spiritual sense is further subdivided into:
  - The allegorical sense, which includes typology. An example would be the parting of the Red Sea being understood as a "type" (sign) of baptism.
  - 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
  - That the historicity of the Gospels must be absolutely and constantly held
  - That scripture must be read within the "living Tradition of the whole Church" and
  - That "the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome"



# Protestant Interpretation

- Many Protestant Christians, such as Lutherans and the Reformed, believe in the doctrine of sola scriptura—that the Bible is a self-sufficient revelation, the final authority on all Christian doctrine, and revealed all truth necessary for salvation; other Protestant Christians, such as Methodists and Anglicans, affirm the doctrine of prima scriptura which teaches that Scripture is the primary source for Christian doctrine, but that "tradition, experience, and reason" can nurture the Christian religion as long as they are in harmony with the Bible.
- 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". He advocated for "one definite and simple understanding of Scripture". John Calvin wrote, "all who refuse not to follow the Holy Spirit as their guide, find in the Scripture a clear light".
- 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 to obtain salvation and to live a Christian life



# Early Christianity



- Christianity developed during the 1st century AD as a Jewish Christian sect with Hellenistic influence of Second Temple Judaism. 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 Jesus, Peter, and John.
- Jewish Christianity soon attracted Gentile God-fearers, posing a problem for its Jewish religious outlook, which insisted on close observance of the Jewish commandments. Paul the Apostle solved this by insisting that salvation by faith in Christ, and participation in his death and resurrection by their baptism, 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.
- Persecution of Christians occurred intermittently and on a small scale by both Jewish and Roman authorities, with Roman action starting at the time of the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD. Examples of early executions under Jewish authority reported in the New Testament include the deaths of Saint Stephen and James, son of Zebedee.
- The Decian persecution was the first empire-wide conflict, when the edict of Decius in 250 AD required everyone in the Roman Empire (except Jews) to perform a sacrifice to the Roman gods. The Diocletianic Persecution beginning in 303 AD was also particularly severe. Roman persecution ended in 313 AD with the Edict of Milan.

# 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. 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 AD; various later churches claim this as their own legacy, including the Coptic Orthodox Church. Important Africans who influenced the early development of Christianity include Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian, Athanasius, and Augustine of Hippo.
- 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.
- King Tiridates III made Christianity the state religion in Armenia between 301 and 314, 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.

# Constantine and Christianity

- 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.[200] 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 5% of the Roman population. Influenced by his adviser Mardonius, Constantine's nephew Julian unsuccessfully tried to suppress Christianity. On 27 February 380, Theodosius I, Gratian, and Valentinian II established Nicene Christianity as the State church of the Roman Empire. As soon as it became connected to the state, Christianity grew wealthy; the Church solicited donations from the rich and could now own land.
- 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 in Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and many other Protestant churches. Nicaea was the first of a series of ecumenical councils, which formally defined critical elements of the theology of the Church, notably concerning Christology. 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, and Constantinople remained the leading city of the Christian world in size, wealth, and culture. There was a renewed interest in classical Greek philosophy, as well as an increase in literary output in vernacular Greek. 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. 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).



# 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. 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.
- 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. 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.
- 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.

# Counter Reformation

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





# Demographics



- With around 2.4 billion adherents according to a 2020 estimation by Pew Research Center split into three main branches of Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox, Christianity is the world's largest religion.
- High birth rates and conversions in the global South were cited as the reasons for the Christian population growth.
- For the last hundred years, the Christian share has stood at around 33% of the world population. 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 Western Europe and North America.
- According to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, within the next four decades, Christianity will remain the largest religion; and by 2050, the Christian population is expected to exceed 3 billion