

Christianity

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Most of the world's religions have gone through significant changes, branched off into different denominations, and migrated throughout the globe—sometimes in the name of conquest and sometimes in the name of freedom. Christianity shares all of these traits, and it has its own unique story. This lesson will briefly outline Christianity's history, look at some of its founding principles, and give an idea of its geographical distribution. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [The History of Christianity](#)
2. [Geographical Distribution](#)

1. The History of Christianity

Historically, Christianity emerged from within the first Western Abrahamic monotheistic religion, Judaism. In the early years, Christianity was a sect within Judaism. The date of the emergence of Christianity is very difficult to pinpoint, mostly because the Gregorian calendar that is used today is entirely based on the events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Therefore, the lens of time is already refracted and greatly influenced by an orientation of **Christian** thought. The fact that the global timeframe and reference base is the Christian calendar speaks to the vast influence of Christianity. When you look more closely, you see that these practical elements point to the metaphysical thought and experience that is part of the Christian theme.

“Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.”

This is a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, a New England Christian theologian, philosopher, and writer from the mid-19th century. There are many atemporal strands within Christianity, and every century has its own manifestations of them.

IN CONTEXT

Regarding the notion of "timelessness", a Christian might say that it was the person of Jesus of Nazareth and his immaculate conception through the Virgin Mother Mary.

His followers were disciples who were committed to his teachings and the belief that he was the Savior and the Son of God, the Jewish messiah who had been prophesied, or foretold, in the Hebrew scriptures. He was referred to as Emmanuel, which means "God with us." More often, he was called Christ, the Greek word for messiah or anointed one, thus the name Jesus the Christ or Jesus Christ.

Followers of Christianity believe that the Son of God came to reconcile humankind to God. As God himself in human form, his life, death, and resurrection served to bridge the worlds of the human and the divine. According to the doctrine of original sin, which was elaborated well after the death of Jesus Christ, he came for the remission of sins, to offer everlasting life to all who believed in him as Christ, Lord, and Savior.

His willful suffering and death on the cross represents a magnitude of significance for many that is impossible to quantify. The Bible stories tell of his resurrection three days later, and it took centuries for its symbolic importance to be formed into doctrine. The work of fully integrating the non-rational transcendence of his life, his death, and his resurrection are the projects, the divisions, the heralds, and the unfolding stories of Christianity through time.



DID YOU KNOW

The death of Christ is generally given the year 30 AD, Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. However, now CE for Common Era is used. For the first few centuries, believers in the divinity of Christ would have to meet in secret, as their meeting for such a purpose was forbidden by Roman law. It wasn't until the fourth century, under Emperor Constantine, that Christians were allowed to practice freely. Christianity was officially legalized in 313 under the Edict of Milan.

For many hundreds of years following that, church councils were meeting to discuss and resolve disputes around issues of creed, doctrine, and practice. The central point of contention among the groups had to do with the Filioque. It's a portion of the Nicene Creed, which is recited as prayer to express the doctrine of the **Trinity**.

The Trinity points to God's unitary nature in the three persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Filioque says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Another version says that it proceeds only from the Father. This was one of the central disagreements for many centuries. Finally, there was a decisive split, called the East-West Schism, in the 11th century.



TERMS TO KNOW

Christian

Anyone who accepts Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, as Lord, and as Savior.

The Trinity

In Christianity, the term used to describe God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost).

2. Geographical Distribution

The East-West Schism left Eastern Orthodox in the East and Russian, Greek, and Roman Catholicism in the West. To this day, it forms the central division, or branches, of Christianity. In the East, the Eastern Orthodox Church has the greatest number of adherents, approximately 300 million. Worldwide, there are more than 1 billion Christians who identify themselves as either Catholics or some denomination of Protestantism.

In 1511, a German monk and former Roman Catholic priest named Martin Luther was driven to revolt against what he felt to be the injustices of the Roman Catholic Church. He spoke about things concerning the sale of indulgences, little tokens that one could buy as a way of getting into heaven. This was becoming very widespread, and Luther saw the church taking advantage of the average person and abusing its power.



DID YOU KNOW

The average person didn't have access to a Bible in their own language. Latin was a scholarly language, and most folks spoke only German. Part of Luther's movement to reform the Church was to translate and distribute the Bible in the language of the layperson.

Luther believed that in addition to availing oneself to the rewards of heaven, one had to first establish a personal relationship with God and Christ by faith alone, *sola fide*. He felt that this was the original message of the Gospels and that it had been polluted by the Roman Catholic greed and politics.

In the early 16th century, the Protestant branch of Christianity shot out and flourished first in northern Germany and then in England with the Anglican church, which separated from the Roman papacy under Henry VIII in 1536. The Protestant Reformation, or **the Reformation** for short, was well on its way to being more than just a reforming institution.

In the following several hundred years, new branches and churches would sprout up. Full autonomy, standalone authority, initiative, and innovation were to take place.

This didn't diminish the breadth and the strength of the Roman Catholic Church. With the age of exploration and colonization came large-scale Christian conversions. As a result, South America is now predominantly Roman Catholic. The US, on the other hand, is traditionally very diverse but retains its Protestant heritage with approximately 48%.

Of course, the US also has a significant number of Roman Catholics as well, 22%, which leaves plenty of room for other voices. Canada is predominantly Roman Catholic. Catholicism also has a significant number of adherents in Asia. Back in Europe, there is, for the most part, a split between the North and South, Protestants in the North and Catholics in the center and the South. However, most Europeans today are non-practicing.



TERM TO KNOW

The Reformation

A movement that culminated in the establishment of Protestantism, started by dissident Roman Catholics seeking to reform the Church.



SUMMARY

The history of Christianity began when it emerged from within Judaism. Christianity wasn't officially legalized until 313 under Emperor Constantine. Historical shifts and conflicts within Christianity gave rise to divisions and separations, most notably the Eastern Orthodox and the western Roman Catholic Church. Within Roman Catholicism, there were further separations and branching off. The Protestant Reformation is the most significant. Some doctrines of the Trinity and the Filioque were points of contention that gave rise to some of these splits and conflicts.

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