CHRISTIANITY

hristianity is the religion that honors Jesus Christ as its founder and as the object of its worship. Its foundational document is the Bible, which is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Christianity is the largest of the world's organized religions, with particular strengths in Europe, the Americas, and Africa, but it is represented in most parts of the world. It represents just under a third of the world's population with roughly 1.5 billion adherents.

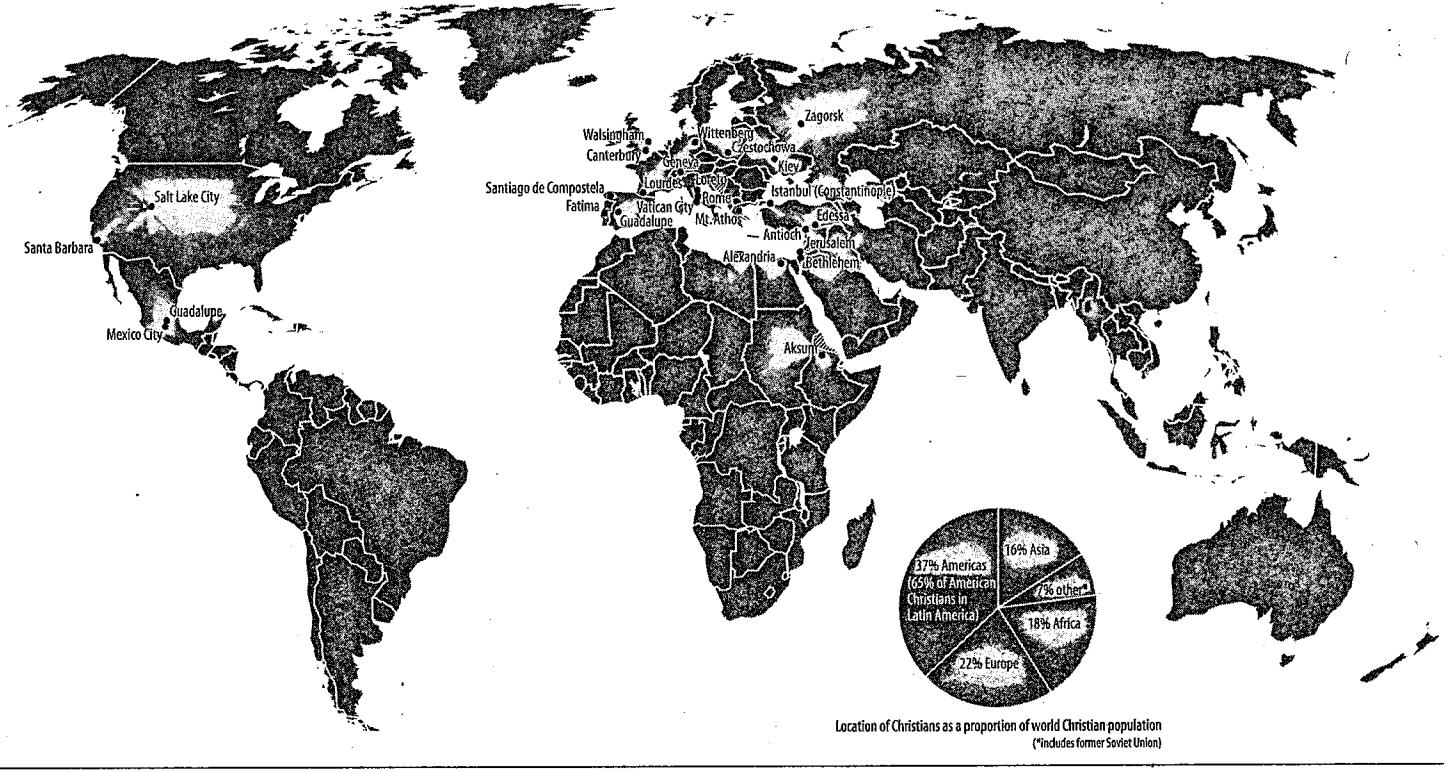
The three largest branches of Christianity, in order of their numerical strength, are traditionally given as Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox, although within those broad categories there are numerous denominations.

HISTORY

Christianity traces its origins to small assemblies of believers, largely (but not exclusively) Jewish in makeup, which arose in Roman Palestine and around the Mediterranean in the second quarter of the first century. These groups preached belief in Jesus Christ (the Greek word *Christ* translates the Hebrew *Messiah,* which means the "Anointed One"), who had been executed in Jerusalem but who, according to this belief, rose from the dead to be exalted in heaven. These early Christians saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the messianic promises contained in the Hebrew Bible. Christianity, then, has intimate ties with Judaism, the religion from which it springs.

Although it is difficult to reconstruct exactly the character of these early congregations, there are hints in the sources (especially the Letters of Paul) that can help understand their broad shape and polity. Their initiation rite, called baptism, represented a symbolic death and rebirth by which the old person was put away in favor of a new state of being. The death and rebirth motif was also reflected in their language, which both described their peculiar inclusive character (e.g., the "saints" or the "elect"), as opposed to those who were not part of the community (the "unrighteous" or the "nonbelievers"). The celebration of a symbolic meal (called the Eucharist, "Thanksgiving") memorialized the risen Christ and his sacrificial death.

Early Christianity slowly separated from its roots in Judaism, but its increasing appeal to the gentile population of the Roman Empire did not exclude it from official suspicion. Indeed, the first four centuries of Christian growth were



Location of Christians as a proportion of world Christian population
(*includes former Soviet Union)

World Distribution of Christians

Christian majority nations

divided Christian/ Muslim

Christians comprise 32.4% of the world's population.
Shaded areas indicate where Christians make up a majority (more than 50%) of an area's population.
Cities shown are important capitals of major forms of Christianity, holy places, or sites of pilgrimage.

1–100	100–200	200–300
Crucifixion of Jesus (ca. 33)	First Roman account of Christians (110)	Beginning of Coptic Christian era (284)
Beginning of Greek Christian literature (ca. 40)	Roman Empire at greatest extent (117)	"Great Persecution" (297–311)
Paul's letters (ca. 50–56)	Formation of New Testament (ca. 125–130)	
Destruction of Temple in Jerusalem (70)	Early Christian Gnostics (fl. 135–140): Basilides, Satornilos, Valentinus, Marcion	
Four Gospels (ca. 70–125)	Montanism (ca. 172)	
First Roman Pope (ca. 91–101)	Beginning of Latin Christian literature (ca. 190)	

500–600	600–700	700–800
Benedictine Rule, Monte Cassino founded (ca. 525)	Byzantine Empire begins (610)	Muslim invasion of Christian Spain (711)
	Beginning of Muslim conquest of Christian Asia Minor and North Africa (632–718)	

punctuated by outbreaks of persecution, although contrary to popular estimation there was no empire-wide or systematic persecution of Christians until 250 under the emperor Decius.

However sporadic these persecutions may have been, they exercised an enormous force on the Christian imagination. Christian martyrs' shrines were places of pilgrimage even before the fourth century. Their death anniversaries were memorialized (thus giving rise, in time, to a complex liturgical calendar that noted both events connected to Jesus Christ and to the sufferings of the martyrs) and churches were built over their tombs. Their courage seemed to have had a positive impact on the growth of the church; the North African theologian Tertullian (d. ca. 220) is famous for his observation that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

The reasons for the widespread growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire have been the subject of much speculation. How a religion honoring an executed provincial criminal who came from a religion (Judaism) that was itself marginal in Roman eyes could become so entrenched that by the end of the fourth century it became the official state religion of the empire is hard to explain. Part of the explanation is external and cultural: the Roman Empire was at peace; it had a common commercial language (common Greek), a safe system of roads, and a tolerance for religious ideas despite its reflexive acts of persecution. All of those factors made it easy for a religion to spread to a willing popula-

300–400		400–500
Armenia becomes first Christian state (301)	Beginning of Ethiopian (or Abyssinian) Christian Church (ca. 350)	Non-Christian religions outlawed, Theodosian Code (410)
Donatist churches in North Africa (fl. 4th–8th centuries)	"Barbarian" invasions of Roman Empire (ca. 375–568)	Beginning of Nestorian Syriac Christianity (ca. 450)
Christianity becomes legal religion in Roman Empire (313)	Jerome's Vulgate (ca. 385)	Council of Chalcedon (451)
Beginning of Christian monasticism, Egypt (ca. 320)	Christianity becomes state religion of Roman Empire, heresy legally defined and prohibited (393)	
Council of Nicaea I (325)		
Constantinople new capital of Roman Empire (333)		

800–900	900–1000	1000–1100
Charlemagne crowned first Holy Roman Emperor (800)	Monastery of Cluny founded (909)	Beginning of schism between Greek and Latin churches, establishment of Russian Orthodox Church (1054)
	Christianity introduced into Russia (ca. 988)	Beginning of conflict between Roman Empire and papacy (1073)
		First Crusade, capture of Jerusalem (1099)

tion. To that must be added a yearning for monotheism among certain classes, the availability of entrance to the religion by all classes and both sexes, the mechanisms for excising remorse or guilt, and a moral and social code that stressed mutual aid and a strong sense of personal ethics.

From the evidence of early Christian history, it seems clear that the religion grew largely through the growth of small communities that then split off to found others. For the first four centuries Christianity's greatest growth occurred in the cities in the Roman Empire and in those places with which Rome had trade or colonial outposts. Indeed, the word *pagan* originally meant a non-city dweller, which, in context, meant one who was not Christianized.

Christians were granted toleration by the emperor Constantine by the Edict of Milan in 311, and Christianity became the official religion of the state by proclamation of the emperor Theodosius in 381. This official recognition had profound implications for Christianity.

Leaving its status as an illegal sect, it now enjoyed the patronage of the state. Inevitably, it absorbed both the sociolegal structures of the larger culture and many of its ideas. Christian communities became designated by geographical areas (parishes and dioceses) overseen by bishops and priests who were aided by deacons and deaconesses who ministered to the social needs of congregations. Large-scale building programs developed and the imperial court took an increasing interest in the social and doctrinal affairs of the church. The social

1100–1200	1200–1300	1300–1400
Albigensians (ca. 1165–1375)	Beginning of Mongol invasion of Christian eastern Europe (1239–1478)	Western "Great Schism" (1378–1417)
Saladin conquers Crusader kingdoms (1188)	Inquisition established (1242)	
Catholic Scholasticism (12th–13th centuries)	Death of Thomas Aquinas (1274)	

development of Christianity brought with it an inevitable growth in differentiated social roles. By the fourth century there was a clear distinction between laity and clergy, with the latter enjoying an ever-increasing prestige and power.

By the fourth century Christianity was represented in urban settlements as far north as Roman Britain and south as Roman Africa; west to the Iberian Peninsula and east to Byzantium (Constantinople) and Roman Syria. In fact, the Syriac Church made incursions, over the centuries, as far east as India as well as possessing a toehold in China. With Constantine's edict of toleration in 311, Christianity absorbed large doses of Roman culture under official patronage. Ecclesiastical districts followed Roman administrative divisions; the legal code of the church reflected Roman jurisprudence; and the state involved itself more in church matters. The simple worship service of the Christians grew increasingly more complex and formal even though its bare outline of the celebration of the Word (i.e., the reading of scripture and preaching about it) and the Sacrament (the celebration of the sacred meal of bread and wine representing the body and blood of Christ) was still discernible.

A further development involved the church's efforts to state its belief in a manner that was coherent and faithful to the original intentions of its founder and his first disciples. This effort involved judgments about what was appropriate and inappropriate (with the inevitable distinction between orthodox and heretical teaching) as well as official statements of the former and condemnations of the latter. These controversies raged in the first five centuries of the church's life and were settled by various councils of bishops (some convened by

1400–1500	1500–1600	1600–1700
Portuguese Catholics begin exploration of Africa (1415)	Beginning of Renaissance (ca. 1500)	Formation of Baptists (1609)
Constantinople captured by Ottoman Turkish Muslims (1453)	Anabaptist groups (ca. 1500)	Formation of Society of Friends (ca. 1665)
End of Byzantine empire (1453)	John Calvin (1509–64)	
Gutenberg Bible (1453)	Beginning of Reformation (1517–21)	
Martin Luther (1483–1546)	Beginning of English Reformation, Anglicans and Puritans (1534)	
Muslim Moorish kingdom ends in Spain (1492)	Beginning of Unitarianism (ca. 1538)	
Jews expelled from Spain (1492)	Establishment of Reformed Church, Geneva (1541)	
First voyage of Columbus (1492)	Beginning of Counter-Reformation (1545)	
	Council of Trent (1545–63)	
	First Catholic mission to Japan (1548)	
	Formation of Scottish Presbyterianism (1560)	
	First Catholic mission to China (1582)	
	Beginning of Congregationalism (ca. 1582)	

the emperor) that were considered ecumenical (i.e., universal). The first eight of these ecumenical councils still stand as a source of special authority in the churches of the East and the West. The net result of these controversies was a series of fundamental doctrinal positions that characterize historic Christianity to the twentieth century: a belief in a trinity of Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one God; a belief that Jesus was born fully human and fully divine but was only one person; a canon of authentic books that make up the New Testament portion of the Bible; the place of bishops as the authentic teachers and pastors of the church.

Christianity's emergence as the religion of the Roman Empire coincided with the slow decline of that empire. Barbarian invasions from the North battered the western empire (the city of Rome was sacked in the early fifth century), and the Eastern empire with its center at Constantinople became increasingly separated from the West and developed its own theology and liturgical practice. Those divisions, centuries in the making, would end in a schism between the two churches in the eleventh century creating a division that has existed to the twentieth century between the Orthodox Church in the East and the Roman Catholic Church in the West.

One form of resistance to Roman culture, discernible from the late third century, was the exodus of religious seekers who fled urban areas for the deserts in order to live a more perfectly religious life. These desert dwellers were the seedbed from which monasticism evolved as they regularized their lives by specific rules and by rigid codes of moral conduct. Monasticism exerted an

1700–1800	1800–1900	1900–
Formation of Morovians (1722)	Formation of Disciples of Christ (1811)	Martin Luther King, Jr., leads non-violent protests against racial segregation in the U.S.A. (1950s–60s)
Formation of Shakers (1747)	Formation of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (1830)	Pope John XXIII (1958–63)
Formation of Methodism (1784)	Formation of Seventh Day Adventism (1844)	Vatican Council II (1962–65)
	Formation of Christian Science (1879)	"Billy" Graham crusades in North America and elsewhere (1950s–90s)
	Formation of Jehovah's Witnesses (1881)	

enormous influence on the shape of Christianity, especially in Syria, Roman Palestine, North Africa, and the Byzantine world. The monastic ideal of a celibate life, of a regular daily round of prayer, of self-denial and asceticism, and of an intense yearning for salvation would leave its mark on later Christianity. Many of the disciplinary practices of the Roman Catholic clergy (e.g., celibacy) have roots in the monastic and ascetical practices of early Christianity.

In the West, when urban life went into decline after the fifth century, the monastic life provided missionaries both to the Germanic countries and to Ireland. In the East, monasteries were centers of religious life in places such as Constantinople and the source for bishops of the church, since bishops were by law celibate. That is still the practice of the Orthodox world in the late twentieth century.

Monasticism (and other, more informal forms of ascetic life) was not the singular domain of men. From the earliest days, there were women ascetics. Organized monasteries of women grew in both the East and the West. In Anglo-Saxon England, for example, these establishments wielded enormous influence on church affairs in the seventh century. Religious orders of women have played an enormous role in the Christian world, especially in Roman Catholic circles, where they have provided not only the personnel for many of the church's social programs but also many of its greatest mystics and spiritual mistresses.

The whole concept of a religious rule of life (Lat. *vita regularis*), characteristic of monasticism, would take on different colorings in the history of Christianity with the rise of religious orders of men and women. Such orders flourished in the West in both the Middle Ages and after the Reformation, where in both eras they were often agents of renewal and reform in the church.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century radically changed the geographical face of Christianity. The traditional Christian strongholds of greater Palestine, Egypt, and North Africa fell to Islam with further Islamic incursions into the Iberian Peninsula in the West and Anatolia in the East. While, in later centuries, there would be pockets of toleration between Islam and Christianity and a fair amount of mutual cultural influence, the response of Christianity was, by and large, hostile. The medieval Crusades were a series of attempts, with varying de-

grees of success, to wrest the Christian holy places in Jerusalem from the "infidel" intruders. Armed struggles between Islamic cultures and Christian Europe persisted well into modern times, as the nineteenth-century Greek revolt against the Ottoman Turks attests.

By the early Middle Ages (roughly after the year 1000) Christianity had spread northward in Europe, balancing the loss of the Islamic South and East. Russia was evangelized from Constantinople at the end of the tenth century, giving it an Eastern form of worship and polity. In time, the Russian Church would see itself as an autonomous "Third Rome," standing as an equal with the patriarchs of ancient Rome and Constantinople. Missionaries from the West evangelized the Scandinavian countries and the rest of Eastern Europe, which was not under the direct influence of Russia or Constantinople.

With the reemergence of urban life in the Middle Ages, cities took on a more important part in the development of religious life. The rurally oriented monastic centers gave way to the preeminence of episcopal life centered around cathedrals. Schools and, eventually, universities were founded in cities. New religious orders such as the mendicant orders of Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Carmelites ministered to urban populations. The papacy became increasingly bureaucratic and took to itself more centralized powers of administration and jurisdiction. Forms of devotional life (the cult of the Virgin, pilgrimage, popular devotions, etc.) multiplied, and religious ideals had an enormous impact on the emerging vernacular literatures (e.g., Dante and Geoffrey Chaucer). Intellectual life was robust, partially because of the rediscovery of Greek learning, which came to the West from Islamic sources, influencing both Christian and Jewish thinkers of the period. The fecund blend of Greek philosophy and Christian theology gave rise to a new synthesis of Christian learning called Scholasticism, a theology of the schools (i.e., of the medieval universities) that supplanted the older monastic theology of the late patristic and early medieval periods.

The eminence of Christian ideas and institutions in the Western medieval world was also its greatest weakness. Repeated attempts to reform the corruption in institutions or to disengage secular control of church life (and wealth) either by official church action (e.g., reforming councils) or charismatic leaders foundered on the embedded self-interest of those who flourished by a lack of reform.

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were times of convulsive religious change. In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks. The city that had been the center of Byzantine Christianity now became an Islamic stronghold, and its premier church of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) was turned into a mosque. In time, the Turks would control many of the traditional Byzantine strongholds, including Greece itself, and would maintain that control until the collapse of that empire's power beginning in the nineteenth century.

The flight of Greek scholars to the West at this time abetted the humanist learning of the Renaissance both in Italy and in the North. Many humanist scholars (preeminently in the North) saw the rise of this "new learning" as one possible vehicle for the reform of Christianity. Although that vision was not to

be realized, these humanists did give the Christian world many of the intellectual tools (Bible translations, critical editions of the patristic period, etc.) that would aid the Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic. The humanist emphasis on interior piety and ethical conversion was a direct reaction against the more externalized religion of the medieval world.

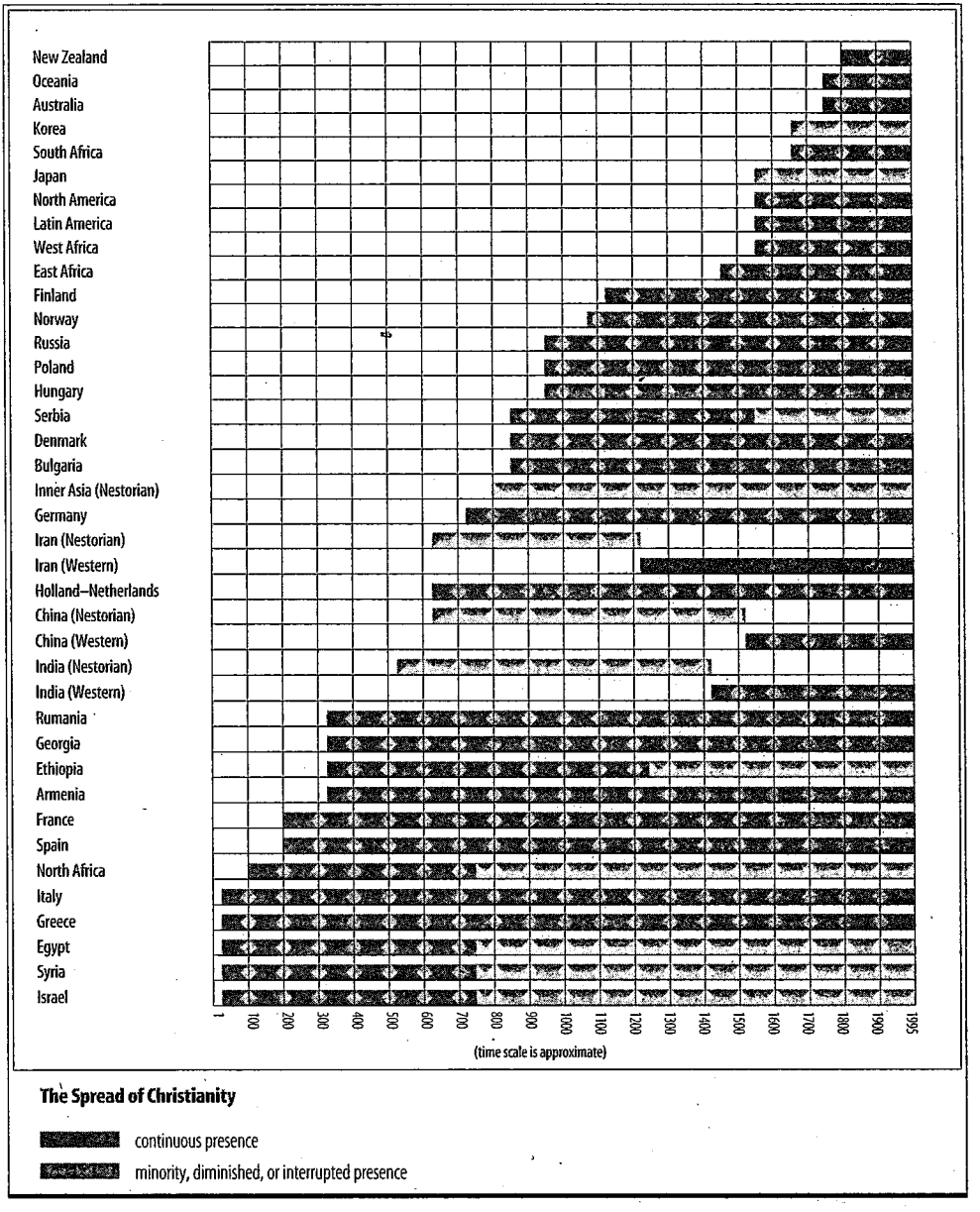
The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, triggered by the efforts of Martin Luther, a German Augustinian friar, fractured the religious unity of Western Europe. Luther was excommunicated by papal edict in 1521. By the middle of the century, the religious map of Europe was totally changed. Reformers such as John Calvin, Martin Bucer, and Huldrych Zwingli brought the Reformed movement to Switzerland. England broke from Rome under the monarchy of Henry VIII. Scotland and Scandinavian countries participated in the Reformation, as did large segments of Northern Germany and parts of what in the 1990s was Czechoslovakia. Besides the classical reformers such as Luther and Calvin, more radical reform movements emerged as diverse sectarian movements that attempted to reconstitute a primitive form of Christianity based on literal readings of the Bible and an adamantine resistance to secular power and privilege.

The Protestant Reformation brought in its wake many cultural changes. It shifted religious sensibility away from the old Catholic sense of the iconic and sacramental toward a renewed interest in the Word of God enshrined in the scriptures. With that shift, vernacular translations of the Bible became crucial as did the concomitant need for greater literacy. The reformers also put great emphasis on music as a vehicle for worship, so that the tradition of vernacular hymnody as well as other musical forms (e.g., the chorale) flourished.

The Catholic response to the Reformation (the Counter-Reformation) took many forms. New religious orders such as the Jesuits attempted to reform the religious life of the Catholic Church. Authoritarian measures such as the Roman Inquisition, the censorship of books, and strong clerical discipline attempted to stem the spread of Reformed ideas in traditional Catholic countries. The Council of Trent, meeting sporadically from 1545 to 1563, defined its doctrine and practice in strong reaction to Reformation theology and practice. The increased centralization of Catholic polity at this time would distinguish modern Catholicism even until the watershed events following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

Catholic missionary ventures were launched both to the New World of the Americas and, less successfully, to India and the Orient in the aftermath of the great period of Renaissance exploration. Similarly, Protestant churches expanded into the New World as a result of the colonizing impulses of England and Holland in the seventeenth century. Both Catholicism and Protestantism made further incursions into countries both in Asia and Africa as a result of colonial expansion that lasted into the early twentieth century.

The rise of the empirical sciences as well as the sociopolitical revolutions attendant on the European Enlightenment lessened the hold of traditional religion, whether Protestant or Catholic, on the minds of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans. Political revolutions in the United States (1776) and



France (1789) triggered new understandings of the relationship of the church to the state. The rise of scientific historical studies and the sharpening of philosophy as an autonomous discipline eroded the eminence of theology both as an academic discipline and as an overarching framework for human understanding. This process (called secularization) brought about both new attempts on the part of the churches to invigorate themselves and a more noticeable shift of religion away from public power to the private sphere.

Looking back on the twentieth century, it is easy to see a series of shifts in the fortunes of Christianity. After long periods of persecution, Christianity seems to be undergoing a resurgence in Eastern Europe in its offer of an alternative meaning system to a discredited Marxism. Western Europe still reflects the secularizing tendencies of its inherited past with the continual erosion of church attendance. Christianity is still vigorous in the United States, a country that the English writer G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) once characterized as a "nation with the soul of a church." The traditional Catholicism of Central and Latin America is being invigorated by liberation theology, but significant numbers of Catholics are also joining Protestant churches, especially those with a strong charismatic and evangelical tone. In the non-Western world, Christianity shows exceptional strength in places such as black Africa (where it competes with Islam), parts of India that have a historic Christian presence (e.g., Kerala), and newly independent countries such as Indonesia. Christianity's growth in these areas of the world is inevitably reshaping how Christianity looks as it acculturates itself in places less touched by European cultural modes of thought and action.

SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

As a total phenomenon, Christianity seems so complex in its history and practice one can forget that, at its core, Christianity is based on a simple premise. Christianity asserts that human beings exist in a state of alienation; that alienation (from each other, from God) has been healed through the life and saving deeds of a single person, Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity, then, has at its heart not an idea but a person. Since Christianity further asserts that this person is both fully human and fully divine, it is clear that this person, Jesus Christ, stands as the paradigmatic figure against which all human effort must be measured. Thus, Jesus does something for humanity and is something for humanity.

There are two traditional modes of assertion of these convictions in Christianity. First, there is the preaching of the Word both as an evangelizing technique and as a practice within worship. Second, there is the memorializing of these truths through symbolic actions or rites, (e.g., sacraments, ordinances). It is broadly true that Reformed Christianity puts a stronger emphasis on the first mode (with its insistence on the scriptures, preaching, evangelizing, singing, etc.) and Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity assert the latter more strongly, as its more conspicuously sacramental, iconic, and liturgical character shows. Some church bodies (e.g., Anglicans, Lutherans) that have strong roots in both traditions often attempt a middle course between the two emphases.

Because of Christianity's insistent claim that Jesus was truly human there is an inevitable element of imitatability in Christianity; i.e., Jesus, as known through the New Testament, is offered to the believer as a model to imitate. Many scholars have insisted that each Christian generation has found a model of Jesus congenial to, or appropriate for, its own cultural era. Indeed, histories of Christianity tracing the changing models of Christ have been frequent in modern times. In times of persecution, churches would emphasize that Jesus suffered persecution and death, just as Byzantine emperors or medieval kings

would find the triumphant Christ who "holds all things in his hands" (the Pantocrater of Byzantine mosaics) a congenial model to worship. In the late twentieth century the image of Jesus as lover and liberator of the poor has had an enormous impact on Christian preaching among the civilly deprived (South African blacks and, in the recent past, African Americans) and the socially marginalized (the *campesinos* of Central and Latin America).

This powerful notion of the imitation of Christ (Gk. *christomimesis*) not only derives from the desire to imagine who Christ is and how he might relate to human life, but also forms the foundation of how people should live; i.e., there is a correlation between christomimesis and Christian ethics. Christianity not only inherits the moral formulations of the Hebrew scriptures (e.g., the Ten Commandments) and the ethical ideals of the ancient Greco-Roman philosophical world (e.g., Stoicism), but also attempts to construct an ethics based on the life and teachings of Jesus. While this ethics is often more honored in theory than in practice, Christianity did (and does) attempt to live out an ethic based on selfless love, care for the poor and the dispossessed, forgiveness of sin, and nonviolence, which Jesus preached as part of his own understanding of those teachings that came from the great classical prophets of ancient Israel.

The complex historical evolution of Christian caregiving institutions (orphanages, hospitals, leprosaria, schools for the poor, etc.) must be seen as attempts to provide instrumentalities for the execution of the command of Jesus to care for "the least of the brethren." Similarly, both historic movements and persons who served the poor and/or attempted betterment of their condition root themselves in this same impulse. Indeed, some commentators have insisted that the early successes of Christianity in the Roman Empire are partially explicable because of the strong commitment of the early Christian communities to provide such aids at a time when social services were rudimentary or nonexistent.

Because Christianity grew largely through the multiplication of communities it was inevitable that the relationship would arise of these communities to the larger culture in general and the state in particular. Christianity went through three great macrodevelopments: from persecution, to establishment (i.e., enjoyment of full state support), to separation from the state and an autonomous existence in most parts of the world. That large picture, however, does not do full justice to the complexity of the issue.

Christianity holds a linear view of history: the world comes from God; history unfolds; and, finally, history will come to an end with the Second Coming of Christ. Inevitably, there is both a yearning for the "not yet" and a concomitant sense of the impermanence of earthly realities.

Historically, Christians of differing times and persuasions have given different emphases to this large worldview. There is a Christian strain of sectarianism that is profoundly ambivalent about "this world," shunning it as temporary and evanescent (e.g., in Catholic monasticism, in sectarian Protestantism) and placing a strong emphasis on the age to come. Another strain sees the coming kingdom as already present, and insists on human work in this world as the establishment of the kingdom in the here and now and as part of God's ultimate plan for the world and humanity.

Many contemporary debates in Christianity (about the role of Christians in the sociopolitical order, for example) ultimately root themselves in the emphasis one chooses to make about the nature of this world in relationship to the end of history. Everything from Third World liberation theology and the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) in Catholicism to the world-affirming Social Gospel or the strong apocalyptic character of some forms of Protestant fundamentalism may be seen as attempts to come to grips with what Augustine (d. 430) called the "two cities" of the world and God.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

As Christianity begins its third millennium, it is faced with serious challenges both in terms of its own self-understanding and in relation to those who do not share its beliefs.

One demographic fact seems inescapable: the greatest growth in Christianity occurs today outside of Western Europe, which has been the historic intellectual center of both Catholic and Reformed Christianity. With that demographic shift comes new expressions of Christianity that are acculturated into new patterns and symbols. The implications of this shift are profound, since these newer centers of Christianity will inevitably provide a new vocabulary and sensibility to Christian self-understanding. The great task of the future will be to hold in balance the essential Christian proclamation while doing justice to the new insights that derive from cultures other than European ones. As the theologian Karl Rahner (d. 1984) has noted, the day when Christianity can be viewed as an "export item" from the West seems largely over. Only the future will tell what shape African or Asian or Oceanic Christianity will look like.

From its beginnings, Christianity has had divisions and schisms within its own body. Only the most utopian of twentieth-century thinkers hopes for a totally undivided Christianity; more realistic commentators hope, and work for, a lessening of tensions and an increase of cooperation between diverse bodies who commonly profess faith in the person of Jesus Christ. Such internal ecumenism could palliate antagonisms between warring Christian bodies (e.g., Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland; Catholics and Orthodox in the Ukraine) as well as lessen the competition between Christian bodies where cooperation (e.g., in social work) would benefit all. This is the task of both the organized ecumenical movement in Christianity and the myriad attempts of Christian groups to grow in mutual trust and to work on common projects. Such trust and cooperation is of paramount importance, since many episodes in Christian history bear witness to how lethal a combination religious zealotry and national identity can be.

Although the foundational Christian documents proclaim the equality of all persons as a root belief springing from the doctrine of the Incarnation, it is only through long meditation, and many false starts, that Christianity has overcome its toleration of slavery, its acceptance of class distinctions, and its passivity in the form of racism. Too often in the past the Christian church was one more vehicle for colonial expansion as, for example, the modern history of Christianity in both Latin America and Africa attest. Current debates about the place of the

emarginated and the emergence of Christian feminism indicate how slowly organized Christianity comes to grips with inequalities within its own ranks.

The relationship of Christianity with other faiths has not always been pacific, as, for example, the long history of Christian anti-Semitism demonstrates. With a rising sense of the complex diversity of religious sentiments in the world (brought to the fore by the globalization of information technologies), dialogue with the world's religions is an urgent task calling both for a greater appreciation of those religions and a lessening of the triumphalism endemic to certain forms of Christian proclamation.

Those same information technologies illustrate the vast inequalities in standards of living and the destitution of immense populations either through natural forces or indifferent political forces. Increasingly, Christian bodies have concerned themselves with the struggle for civil rights and for the amelioration of degraded living conditions. Nothing in current history indicates that such struggles are over.

That Christianity has not matched its own rhetoric with perfect performance should surprise no one, least of all Christians. Its founder asserted that the "wheat and the weeds" would coexist until the end of history. Authentic Christianity is not a perfectionist religion but one living in the ambiguities and disappointments of history. This fact does not absolve it from the need to realize the kingdom envisioned by Jesus of Nazareth, but it does mean that, for the Christian believer, the perfection of what Jesus was and what he preached will only come to full realization in the consummation of history. That point was made by Augustine of Hippo in his monumental work *City of God* (413–426): "For the City of the saints is up above, although it produces citizens here below, and in their persons the City is on pilgrimage until the time of its kingdom comes."