

## The Philosophy behind 'One Christ, Multiple Churches'

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Religion is the identity of every person as it not only indicates his views but also his belief and moral system. Thus, religions are the strongest force of the society for they make each person special in the entire setup of the society. The world due to its immense size has various religions and belief systems. However, the three main dominating religions are Islam, Christianity and Judaism, all having their own apostles, sacred texts, sanctified worship places and moral values.

Christianity, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the largest followed religion and is believed to be prevalent in half of the world. Moreover, it is believed to have the world's largest cultural, political and religious development.

Huston Smith, in *The World's Religions* writes, "Who then was Jesus whom New Testament scholars are beginning to return to view? He was born in Palestine during the reign of Herod the Great, probably around 4 B.C.- our reckoning of the centuries that purports to date from his birth is almost certainly off by several years. He grew up in or near Nazareth, presumably after the fashion of other normal Jews of the time. He was baptized by John, a dedicated prophet who was electrifying the region with his proclamation of God's coming judgment. In his early thirties, he had a teaching healing career, which lasted between one and three years and was focused largely in Galilee. In time he incurred the hostility of some of his own compatriots and the suspicion of Rome, which led to his crucifixion on the outskirts of Jerusalem"<sup>(1)</sup>. The Spirit of Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim good news to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"<sup>(2)</sup>.

Scholars believe that Jesus began his preaching around the age of thirty and it included recruiting his disciples who conceived him as wonderworker, Healer of Man and Son of God.

The Christian movement initially known as "The Way" was like a spiritual explosion. Ignited by the resurrection and fueled by the Holy Spirit, the church grew in all directions, geographically as well as socially. It was a unified church with spiritual vision, a conviction that all Christians should be one body, thought of as the Holy Catholic Church. The early Church fathers were Catholic not Protestant. Jesus sent his disciples into the entire world, and Paul had opened the churches to the Gentiles<sup>(3)</sup>.

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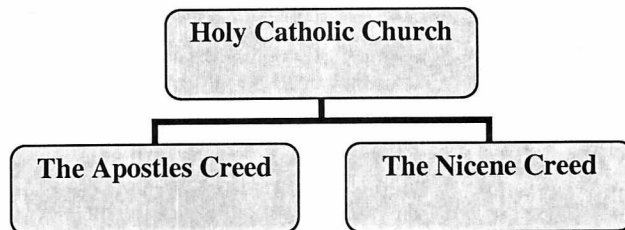
By A.D. 70 there were in effect two Christian churches with two very different kinds of Christianity: The Jewish Church, centered in Jerusalem, which retained its ties to the Jewish community and Jewish traditions and customs, and the Gentile church, existing outside Palestine. It had no attachment to things Jewish at all, but believed in Jesus as savior of mankind, preached by Paul. In A.D. 70, the Romans demolished and destroyed Jerusalem as well as the Jewish church setup. This left the Gentile Church as the only existing church and form of Christianity. Thus, the great reformation of religion known as 'Christianity' initiated by Jesus himself was now in pieces and quite different<sup>(4)</sup>.

In 313 A.D. Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome and ruled till 337 A.D. Christianity then became the all favored and official religion of Rome. Peace prevailed and persecution was banned. This facilitated the preaching of Holy Spirits words and collection of funds for further building of churches. And it was this move of extension of churches that marked the end of unified church.

During the unified early age of the church, two basic faiths/beliefs were agreed upon by the Christians of that time:

1. The Apostles Creed
2. The Nicene Creed

It is these creeds that now unite all the Christians under the banner of one common faith: Christianity<sup>(5)</sup>.

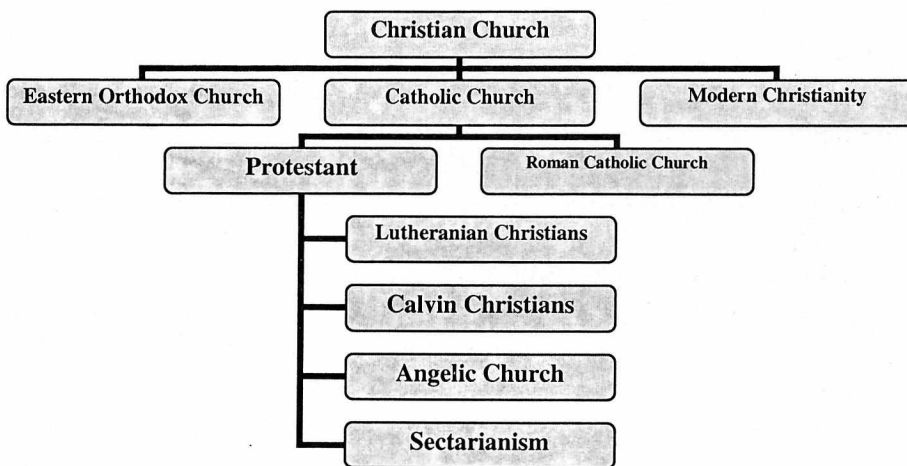


### **Split Between the East and West:**

By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the Roman Empire was too vast to be ruled by one emperor at all. Thus, for convenience, Emperor Diocletian split it into two: and eastern half including Greece, Asia minor, Palestine and Egypt, where the predominant language was Greek; and Western half including Spain, Italy and Gaul, where the predominant language was Latin. This split of faith had quite a deteriorating and dividing effect on the faith of Christianity.

Gradually the two divided churches began to drift apart and many differences arose between the two. The Eastern Church became an empire of its own as the ruling power/person seemed to head the church whereas; the western church still retained its independence. The Eastern Church despite honoring the Bishop of Rome still limited him to his own group of people but on the other hand, the Western Church seemed to increasingly honor the Bishop.

Eventually in 1054, the two churches excommunicated each other and thus, the Eastern Church now is termed as Orthodox Church and Western as the Catholic Church<sup>(6)</sup>.



### Split Between east and West and Further Branches

#### Western Churches Reformation:

During the Middle Ages many Christians resorted to the Jerusalem area which had the Jesus' sacred and historical places and the churches built by Constantine. However, Jerusalem then was under the reign of Muslims. This led to many bloody invasions as both the parties wanted the reign of Jerusalem. The Eastern Church, weakened by invasions and its own decentralization had less need for reformation. However, the Western church with its expansive development and centralized power needed reformation. Earlier attempts of reformation made by John Wycliffe and Jan Hus were in vain. However, the one made by Martin Luther was quite successful<sup>(7)</sup>.

#### Derivation of Protestant Churches:

##### Martin Luther and Calvin

In 1517, Martin Luther raised the standard of protest against this development. He inaugurated the movement that cast off the authority of the

Catholic Church. The people who had tried to do so before had run afoul as they were given no protection at all. However, Luther managed to get the support of the German Prince. On the other hand, John Calvin (1509-64) developed a related viewpoint in a more systematic way. His way of preaching was to express the views expounded by Luther quite explicitly in contrast to Luther himself who had done so quite tacitly<sup>(8)</sup>.

The views held by Luther and Calvin had significant differences. Nevertheless, both had mutual faiths and doctrines, depending on the belief of God being the savior.

### The Anglican Church

The third form of Reformation Church is the Anglican Church, which contains the elements of both the Lutheran Church and the Calvin Church. Anglican Church was introduced by King Henry VIII of England. The main concern in this period was the authority of the Pope. The Anglican Church introduced by Henry made the Monarch the head of the English Church but no other amendments were made in the church's doctrines<sup>(9)</sup>.

Michael Molloy writes about the Anglican Church that,

“A third form of Protestantism, which originated in England under King Henry VIII (1491-1547), unites elements of the Reformation with older traditional practices. Some see the Anglican Church as a compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Perhaps it is a compromise, because it was born not so much out of Henry's interest in reform as it was out of his interest in marriage... He also kept the basic structure of religious services much as before, although they were conducted in English. He even maintained priestly celibacy, although it was repealed soon after he died. As a concession to the reformers, Henry had an English translation of the Bible placed in each church for all to read. The Church of England had a shaky beginning, but Henry's daughter Elizabeth, when she finally became queen, established it firmly”<sup>(10)</sup>.

### Sectarianism

Division of churches started then and there after the split of East and West. Therefore, many differences arose in the perception of beliefs and the Sacred texts. There happens to be a group of Protestantism which is called to be a 'loose group'.

“Some have interpreted the Bible with literal seriousness, thus producing special emphases-among them, the rejection of the outside world and its technology; the adoption of extremely simple lifestyles, total pacifism, or complete celibacy; and the expectation of the imminent end of the world. As

a loosely defined group, this branch of Protestantism is called Sectarianism”<sup>(11)</sup>.

The further sects of Sectarianism are:

1. The Anabaptists
2. The Quakers
3. The Shakers
4. The Pentecostals
5. The Methodist Church

### **The Roman Catholic Church:**

Roman Catholic Church was basically called so when the rift occurred between the East and the West, dividing the Church into Eastern and Western Church. However, during the Middle Ages, the reformation again divided the western church into two halves: Protestant and Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church, today is the most vast and followed church. It focuses in the Vatican in Rome and spreads from there, being dominant, on the whole through southern and central Europe, Ireland and South America<sup>(12)</sup>. It traces its foundation to Jesus and the Twelve Apostles. It sees the bishops of the church as the successors of the apostles and the pope in particular as the successor of Peter, the leader of apostles. Catholics support the view in the words of the Bible

“...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church... I will give the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”<sup>(13)</sup>.

The major beliefs of the Roman Catholics are:

1. The Authority of Church: Catholics believe that it is the church that has the ruling authority and the true power of interpretation of Scripture.
2. Pope: Bishop of Rome, the Pope has the supreme power over all Christians and whatever he says is binding for all. Pope is the descendant of Christ and representative of Pope.
3. Seven Sacraments: According to the Catholics, God’s grace is bestowed by following the Seven Sacraments. These are:
  - o Baptism- eradication of sins.
  - o Confirmation- complete baptism and give oneself to holy spirit
  - o Holy Eucharist- Holy Communion.
  - o Penance- confession of sins in front of a priest so as to free oneself from sins.
  - o Anointing the Sick- the priest anoints the sick with oil and prays for him.
  - o Holy Orders- Ordaining of three levels of bishops, priests and deacons.

- Matrimony- union of man and woman. Divorce or remarriage cuts the believer from Eucharistic Communion.
- Purgatory and Indulgences- despite good works, entrance into heaven is not promised. A man may have to face a stage where he is freed from sins.
- Mary and Other Saints: Catholics pray and saints intercede for them in front of God <sup>(14)</sup><sup>(15)</sup>.

“The Roman Catholics believe their church to be the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, possessing all the properties of the one, true Church of the Christ... The Centre of the Roman Catholic worship is the celebration of Mass, the Eucharist, which is the commemoration of Christ’s sacrificial death and of his resurrection. Other sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Matrimony, Ordination and Extreme Unction, seven in all. The Virgin Mary and saints, and their relics, are highly venerated and prayers are made to them to intercede with God, in whose presence they are believed to dwell. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian organization in the world, found in most countries”<sup>(16)</sup><sup>(17)</sup>.

### **The Eastern Orthodox Church:**

The Eastern Orthodox Church originated when a rift occurred between the Eastern and the Western Churches. This sect of Christianity faced much persecution in the hands of the invaders of Jerusalem, however, it still survived.

There are estimated to be 250 million Eastern Orthodox Christians today. The Orthodox Church stretches over Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Eastern Europe, Slavic countries and the eastern Mediterranean.

In many ways, from the Biblical Christian View, the Eastern Orthodox Church stands close to Roman Catholic Church as it can be seen in the following overview: <sup>(18)</sup><sup>(19)</sup>

1. Authority of Church: Church possesses sole authority over the Scripture.
2. Apostolic Succession: believe in apostolic succession of the bishops.
3. Salvation and Sacraments: observation of seven sacraments is the same as Catholics with difference in interpretation. Eucharist means Christ is present in the elements of bread and wine. Baptism forgives original sins with regular confessions. Salvation is attained through the work of deification (become like God)

4. Veneration of saints and Icons: The orthodox pray to saints, particularly Mary, because these people have achieved deification. "Orthodox Church comprises the faith and practice of Churches stemming from ancient Churches in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The eastern Orthodox Churches recognize only the canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils (325- 787 A.D.) as binding for faith and they reject doctrines that have been added in the West... The number of sacraments in the Orthodox Church is the same as in the Western Catholic church"<sup>(20)</sup>.

### Modern Christianity:

There happen to be some Christians who are neither Catholics, Orthodox nor Protestant. They may have believed in some of the characteristics of all three of the churches.

"Liberal Christianity typically supports Christianity not as a divine revelation, but because of its moral vision. Liberal Christianity may keep the traditional Christian liturgy, including the creeds, but allows them to be understood in a symbolic rather than literal sense. In Liberal Christianity moral concern is typically at the forefront"<sup>(21)</sup>.

### An overview of the Main Branches of Christianity

	<b>Roman Catholic</b>	<b>Eastern Orthodox</b>	<b>Protestant</b>	<b>Biblical Christianity</b>
Number of Believers	Over 1 billion	250 million	575 million	Unknown
Geography	Worldwide	Eastern Europe, slav Countries, Mediterranean	Worldwide	worldwide
History	Developed form apostolic church	Separated in 1054 AD	Separated in sixteenth century reformation	Books of Acts, 33 A.D.
God	Belief in trinity	Belief in trinity	Belief in trinity	Belief in trinity
Bible	Historical reliable word of God	Historical reliable word of God	Historical reliable word of God	Historical reliable word of God
Jesus Christ	Messiah and God	Messiah and God	Messiah and God	Messiah and God
Resurrection	Historical fact	Historical fact	Historical fact	Historical fact
Apostles Creed	Completely accepted	Completely accepted	Completely accepted	Completely accepted
Nicene Creed	Completely accepted	Completely accepted	Completely accepted	Completely accepted



God's Word	Scripture, tradition and Pope	Scripture, Traditions and Bishop	Scripture	Scripture
Authority	Apostolic succession	Apostolic succession	Varies	The original apostles
Head of church	Pope	Council of bishops	Varies	Jesus Christ
Salvation	Faith+Sacraments+works	Faith+Sacraments+works= deification	By Faith, Grace, Christ	By obedient Faith, Grace, Christ
Saints and Mary	Veneration and super veneration	Veneration to help with deification	-	-
Purgatory	Place of preparation for heaven	-	-	-

(22)

### **Conclusion:**

Christianity began with Jesus, the Christ and was in its pure form during his short-lived life. It was his death and his resurrection that eventually led to further extension of the unified Church and faith and then its rift into multiple ones. It was then the division of the two that shook the whole foundation of the religion and then Christian Church was divided into further sects. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact of all the subdivisions of Christianity sharing the common beliefs of Trinity, Jesus the Messiah and Scripture being the Sacred Text.



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