

Christianity

Christianity began with Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew who was born in Judea (modern Israel) around 4 BC. At the time, Judea was a province of the Roman Empire. Little is known of his early life, but around the age of 30, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and had a vision in which he received the blessing of God.

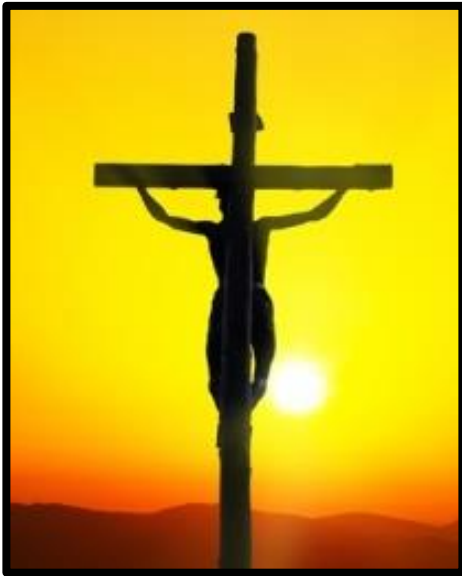


Figure 1: Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem makes it the hearth of Christianity

After this event, he began a ministry of teaching, healing, and miracle working. He observed the Jewish faith and was well acquainted with the Jewish Law. Jesus spoke of the "kingdom of God," condemned religious hypocrites and interpreted Jewish law in new ways. He spoke before crowds of people, but also chose twelve disciples whom he taught privately. Jesus taught his disciples about a "new covenant", that God would grant everlasting life (salvation) to humanity through belief in Jesus. His disciples eagerly followed him, believing he was the long-awaited Messiah of Jewish prophesy who would usher in the kingdom of God on earth.

After just a few years, however, opposition to Jesus grew. Jesus' teachings stirred the passions of people and created instability, something the Romans and the Jewish religious authorities feared. He was ultimately executed by crucifixion by the Romans in Jerusalem (making that city the hearth of Christianity). Three days later, according to believers, Jesus rose to life, having conquered death, to give hope to a hopeless world. The disciples reported that Jesus appeared to them on several occasions and then ascended into heaven before their eyes.

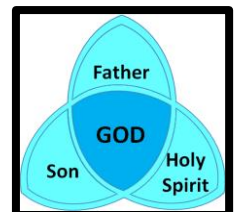
The Early Church

During the remainder of the first century AD, the number of Jesus' followers, who came to be called "Christians," grew rapidly. Instrumental in the spread of Christianity was a man named Paul, a zealous Jew who had persecuted Christians. Paul converted to the faith after experiencing his own vision of the risen Jesus. Taking advantage of the extensive system of Roman roads and the time of peace, Paul went on numerous missionary journeys throughout the Roman Empire. He started churches, then wrote letters back to them to offer further guidance and encouragement. Many of these letters would become part of the Christian scriptures, the "New Testament."

In the second and third centuries AD, Christians struggled with persecution under Roman authority and with debates about doctrine ("standard beliefs") between themselves.

A major turning point in Christian history came in the early 4th century AD (300s), when the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. The Christian religion became legal, persecution ceased, and thousands of pagans now found it convenient to convert to the Christianity. Eventually, Christianity was declared to be the official religion of the empire and the practice of other religions was outlawed. Allied with the Roman Empire, Christianity rose in power until it became the "Christendom" that would encompass the entire western world in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

In 325 AD, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea so that the bishops could work out their differences over doctrine. They declared the Son (Christ) to be of "one substance" with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is represented by the trinity. It also allows Christianity to be classified as monotheistic.



In 476 AD, the portion of the Roman Empire in the West (centered around Rome) fell. The political center of the Empire shifted to Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul in Turkey). The church in Rome (not the Empire) took greater influence over Western Europe while in Constantinople the patriarch led the church under the control of the (Eastern) Roman emperor. Over time, the considerable religious, cultural, and political differences grew between the Eastern "Orthodox" church centered in Constantinople, and the Western "Catholic" church centered in the old capital, Rome. Religiously, they had different views on topics like the use of icons (religious statues), the Holy Spirit, and the date of Easter. Culturally, the Eastern church became more Greek in language and philosophy, while the West remained more Latin-influenced.

1054 AD: The Great Schism

These differences finally came to a head in 1054 AD, when Pope Leo IX (the bishop of Rome) excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, the leader of the Eastern church. The Patriarch condemned the Pope in return, and the Christian church became divided into the West ("Roman Catholic") and East ("Greek Orthodox") branches.

Eastern Orthodoxy came to play a prominent role in Eastern European (Greek, Russian, Serbian, etc.), Middle Eastern and some African cultures (the Ethiopian church is more Orthodox than Catholic in its practices) while Roman Catholicism became more influential in Western Europe.



Figure 2: Catholic Church



Figure 2: Eastern (Russian) Orthodox Church

The Protestant Reformation

In the 1400s, some western Christians began to publicly challenge aspects of the Roman Catholic church. They spoke against the abuse of authority and corruption in Christian leadership. They called for a return to the word of God found only in the Bible and a stripping of traditions and customs like purgatory, the veneration ("great respect", "reverence") of saints and relics, the elimination of several sacraments and many other practices not explicitly found in the Bible. They criticized the corruption of church leaders who lived opulent lives surrounded by Renaissance art and the stylings befitting monarchs rather than men of God. They began to translate the Bible - then available only in Latin - into the vernacular languages of the people. However, these early reformers did not have widespread success, and most were executed for what was considered heresy. Heresy is a belief or opinion that does not agree with the official belief or opinion of a particular religion. A heretic commits heresy.

In 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther posted 97 theses ("complaints") against the practice of selling indulgences on a church door. He believed in the justification by faith alone. Growing German nationalism (the belief that an ethnic group should have control over their own affairs) and the invention of the printing press ensured that Luther's teachings spread quickly. He was excommunicated as a heretic by the Pope and barely escaped with his life on more than one occasion, but Luther lived out his life spreading the Reformation, and died a natural death. His ideas had already spread throughout northern Germany, and similar reforming movements sprung up in England (mostly political not theological) and Switzerland.

Another branch of Christianity had been born. It is known as Protestantism. Since one of their major complaints was the hierarchical nature of the Roman Catholic church, Protestantism rejected central authority and splintered into many various factions including Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican. Soon much of Europe was embroiled in religious wars, with various Protestant factions fighting each other and the Catholics for religious and political freedom.



Figure 3: Breakup of the Western Church (excludes Eastern Orthodox and Islam)



Figure 4: Various Branches and Denominations of Christianity

The Diffusion of Christianity

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Christians of many theological factions migrated across the Atlantic pulled by both colonial settlement and the missionary impulse to convert natives to the faith. Much of the Western Hemisphere therefore reflects the branch of Christianity which predominated in the mother country. Latin America (mostly colonized by the Spanish and Portuguese) became Roman Catholic as Spain and Portugal remained loyal to Rome during the Reformation. While places where the British colonized (North America) became predominantly Protestant. There are exceptions to this pattern as French Catholics settled in Quebec in North America and British and Dutch Protestants settled some areas in Latin America (Suriname, Guyana, Jamaica, Belize, etc.).

Christianity also spread via colonialism to places like the Philippines (Catholic Spain) and Australia/New Zealand (Protestant Britain). During the Scramble for Africa in the late 1800s, European countries spread their respective branch of Christianity into colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. The pattern linking the Christian branch with the mother country continued here. For example, the Dem. Rep. of Congo (Belgium), Mozambique and Angola (Portugal), and Madagascar (France) are more Catholic. While Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya (all UK) are more Protestant.

Eastern Orthodox belief also spread via the Russian expansion across Siberia.

While the United States is a mostly Protestant country due to British colonialism, it has a significant Catholic presence due to later immigration waves. The Northeast/Rustbelt area (especially urban areas) have large numbers of Roman Catholics because it attracted Irish and southern German immigrants in the mid-1800s and later Poles and Italians in search of industrial jobs in the late 1800s/early 1900s. Also, large cities and areas closer to Latin America (SW border states, Florida) have more Catholics as they attract Hispanic (largely Catholic) immigrants due the gravity model and attraction of large cities as immigrant destinations (Ravenstein).

Today, Roman Catholics are 50% of Christians, 25% are Protestants, 10% Eastern Orthodox and 15% are “other” or more difficult to categorize. For a more complete understanding of the distribution and diffusion of Christianity, you will be completing the Distribution of Global Religions mapwork using the PowerPoint instructions as a guide.

Impact on the Cultural Landscape

Today, Christianity is the largest world religion, with about two billion adherents. It is the majority religion of Europe and the Americas, and there are churches in every nation in the world. There are hundreds of Christian denominations, all of whom believe in the basic ideas established at the Council of Nicaea but differ in other matters of doctrine and practice and have different historical influences. This can be seen in the impact of each branch on the cultural landscape. You should be able to identify an area where there is Christian influence but also be able to discern which of the three branches predominates in an area. You can do this by understanding different architectural and symbolic representations used in the three branches.

Historical influences impacting the Cultural Landscape

Eastern Orthodox Church

One of the key differences between the branches of Christianity is their historical influences. This is especially true regarding the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches. As explained earlier, the Eastern Orthodox branch grew out of the Roman Empire after it became centered in Constantinople (sometimes referred to as the “Eastern Rome Empire” or the “Byzantine Empire”) while the Roman Catholic Church was centered in Rome and had influence over a politically fragmented Western Europe after the fall of Rome.

As a result, the Eastern Orthodox church became much more “Greek” in its styling. One of the most significant Greek influences on the Eastern Orthodox cultural landscape is the use of mosaics. Mosaics are works of art constructed from tiny pieces of glass or stone to create a unified image. Derived from Greek roadbuilding techniques these pieces of art became prominent in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. They exist outside of Eastern Orthodoxy but are MOST associated with this branch of Christianity. Below are examples of the *Deesis Mosaic* in the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, Turkey (once Constantinople).

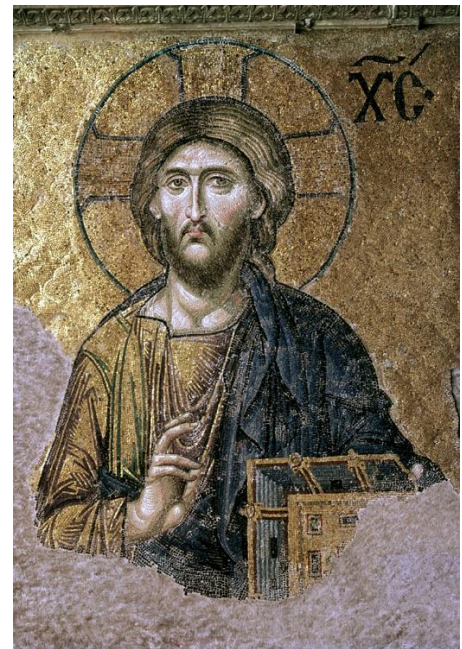


Figure 5: Deesis Mosaic in the Hagia Sofia in Constantinople, Eastern Roman Empire/Byzantine Empire (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey)

However, in the 1400s, Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks who were followers of Islam. As a result, Constantinople lost much of its later influence over this branch of Christianity. Instead influence shifted to ‘national’ churches, the largest of which is the Russian Orthodox Church. Russians often refer to Moscow as the “Third Rome.”

Russian stylistic influences are the easiest way by which you can identify Eastern Orthodoxy. These include the “onion dome” and the “Russian Orthodox cross” pictured below. The onion dome is believed to be derived from Asian influence on Russian culture (the area that later became Russia was dominated by Mongol invaders known as the Golden Horde). St. Basil’s Cathedral (below) in Moscow is a great example of onion dome architecture.

The Russian Orthodox Cross was adopted by Ivan the Terrible (an early Russian czar/tsar) and later used by Russian leaders to Russify conquered peoples. It includes three cross bars which include the upper identifier of Jesus as “King of the Jews”, the standard bars to which the crucified arms are attached and the footrest which prolonged the agony of execution. The footrest is slanted downward to the left of the crucified to indicate the position of the unrepentant thief who was executed alongside Jesus (You know where he’s going!). Another variation of this cross also depicts the cross on top of a crescent symbolizing the dominance of Christianity over Islam in the Russian Empire.



Figure 6: Russian Orthodox Cross



Figure 7: Russian Orthodox Cross with Crescent

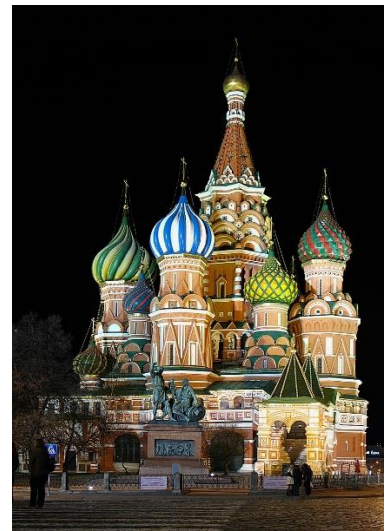


Figure 8: St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow Russia

Roman Catholicism vs. Protestantism

While Eastern Orthodoxy influenced Russia and parts of Eastern Europe, Roman Catholicism dominated in the West. The Church remained an organizing force during the Middle Ages while politically the area remained fragmented. As explained above, the Roman Catholic Church became increasingly corrupt and involved in secular affairs. It involved itself in wars, political intrigue and its leaders lived opulent lives surrounded by the finest art. Since the Roman Catholic Church was centered in Italy, it also became one of the great patrons of the Renaissance. Artists such as Michealangelo and Da Vinci were rewarded with many church commissions. Their art came to decorate many Roman Catholic cathedrals that popes built. Below is Michelangelo's depiction of the *Creation of Adam* which is found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, the residence of the pope.



Figure 9: Creation of Adam, Michelangelo.
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Rome

How Beliefs Affect the Cultural Landscape

While one could argue that their accumulation of art and huge building projects were just a sign of papal corruption, they also have a doctrinal connection to Roman Catholic thought. The church saw itself as the spiritual guide to the faithful, as a required intermediary who would show the common people the way to salvation. This is exemplified by their veneration of saints. They believe saints can be asked to intercede on the faithful's behalf with God. They believe that a priesthood is needed to interpret God's words for the faithful and consequently the church has a very hierarchical structure. Today, the Roman Catholic Church has one of the most centralized organizational structures. It is divided into parishes which are grouped into dioceses/archdioceses. All of these units are ultimately under the direction of the pope. So there is little doctrinal variation throughout the Roman Catholic world.

Since, Roman Catholic leadership saw themselves as intermediaries through which people would reach salvation, they came to believe their places of worship should be as opulent and awe-inspiring as possible. They saw paintings, statues, stained glass and religious icons (items connected to a holy person) as methods by which to draw people to the church and its message. Therefore, traditional Roman Catholic churches tend to be ornate and richly decorated with soaring spires and vaulted ceilings drawing the worshippers eyes upward toward God.



Figures 10: Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris



Figure 11: Interior St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome

One of the biggest complaints of “reformers” like Martin Luther about the Roman Catholic Church was that it had begun doctrines that weren't found in the Bible. Luther believed these doctrines were invalid. He believed that only through faith (belief in Jesus) NOT through faith AND good works (as the Roman Catholic Church believed) could one reach salvation. He also stated that since the Bible did not make provisions for intermediaries to guide a person to salvation that the existence of popes, bishops and priests was unnecessary. He called this the “priesthood of all believers.”

He also came to see the church as corrupt and its reliance on icons and religious artifacts was a form of idol worship. The belief that religious artifacts should be rejected is known as iconoclasm. Over time, as Protestant thought became more rigid, the veneration of saints, ornate decoration and sacraments not specifically found in the Bible were rejected by some Protestant denominations (a “denomination” is a sect that develops because Protestantism). In general, Protestantism is less hierarchical and decentralized than Roman Catholicism. Some denominations have a more centralized structure like Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and Presbyterianism. While other likes Baptists make decisions at the congregation (or church) level. Because the Protestant branch is more decentralized different denominations may have different beliefs regarding various doctrines and may show differences consequently on the cultural landscape.

So how do Protestant ideas manifest (“display or show”) themselves on the cultural landscape? Generally Protestant churches adopt a more iconoclastic approach with a simple style having less decoration. Places of worship are seen as seen a place where the faithful can come together in contemplation as they try to reach God personally through prayer (priesthood of all believers). Many Protestants also believe that excess decorations borders on idolatry. Examples of stereotypical Protestant places of worship are found below.

In addition, the Christian symbol of the cross differs between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Roman Catholics use a crucifix which is a cross with the body of Christ depicted. Protestants tend to use a plain cross. Under Catholic belief, the crucifix reminds the viewer of Christ's sacrifice and some believe it was used dramatically to stress this to largely uneducated followers in the early days of the church (this is similar to the need to awe and impress parishioners). Protestants, on the other hand, use the plain cross to symbolize that Christ has been resurrected. In addition, some Protestants believe that the crucifix borders on idol worship.




Figure 12: Protestant Church



Figure 13: Protestant Church Interior


**THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN CRUCIFIX AND CROSS:**



CRUCIFIX

The Crucifix (a Cross with a Corpus) is a symbol used by the Catholic Church. Its name is derived from the Latin word *cruci fixus* which means "fixed to a cross." It thus refers to an image of Jesus fixed to a cross which is distinct from a plain cross.

Most crucifixes include the sign INRI across the top. INRI is the Latin abbreviation for "Jesus Nazareus, Rex Iudaeorum" or Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.



CROSS

The cross is a symbol of Christianity. But there are over 35,000 Christian denominations in the world. More often than not, protestants do not have the body of Christ on the Cross. In Roman times, the cross was an instrument of torture and public humiliation.

Today, the cross has been adopted as a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice. It evokes Jesus' death and, more importantly, His resurrection.

Note: Catholics understand that both the simple cross and the crucifix are symbols of our faith, helping us to recall Jesus' great sacrifice for us.

Figure 14: Differences between Catholic crucifix and Protestant cross

Finally, another one way that religion manifests itself on the cultural landscape is how it disposes of its dead. Traditionally, Christians have used burial for this purpose (the Roman Catholic Church has only allowed cremation since 1963 and then still insists on burial as opposed to the scattering of ashes or keeping them at home). Bodies were buried in churchyards and later cemeteries designed for this purpose. Burial in cemeteries has pros and cons. It can use up valuable arable land especially in areas where increased food production would be beneficial. However, before the establishment of parks by city officials, cemeteries served as greenspaces in overcrowded rapidly industrializing cities. Often cemeteries are associated with a particular religious branch or denomination. In that case, their appearance would match much of the above discussion regarding religious symbols and ornamentation.