

# Where did all the Christian denominations come from?

These notes are in addition to what is covered in Interlocked Lesson 44.

This lesson goes through the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, providing a brief timeline of selected events that give a history of the church, with a focus on how a number of the major denominations began.

(Note: Christian denominations are denoted in **RED CAPITAL LETTERS**.)

## Introduction

In AD 33, Jesus entrusted all His teaching to His disciples before He ascended. Many of them were not highly educated. But they took what they had learnt and with the help of the Holy Spirit, they went out to share the good news and to teach disciples about God. Thus the church grew.



Because God gave the gospel to ordinary people, the growth of the church followed a very bumpy road through history. There has been a lot of human failure along the way. And Satan has never stopped trying to distract, divide and destroy God's work. But Yahweh has preserved His Word and the Holy Spirit continues to do His work of guiding disciples into all truth (John 16:13).



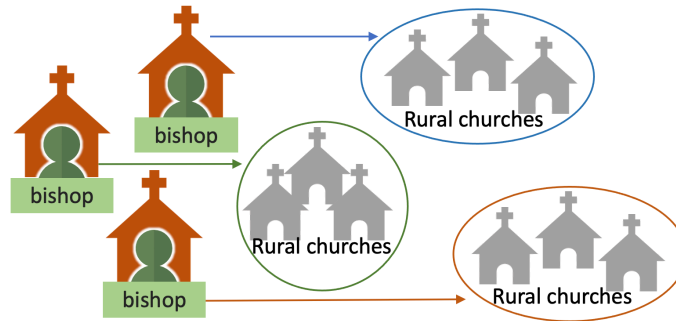
As we journey through the history of the church, note the many similarities with Old Testament events, where many situations looked as if God's plan might be defeated. But Yahweh is sovereign and faithful. He continues to raise up those who take His Word seriously, repent of their sins and wrong teaching, and in humility follow Him at all costs. As we go through church history, be amazed at how despite so many human failings, God continues to make His gospel go forth in power. His plans continue to unfold and are unstoppable.



This is our family history, a history of genuine struggle against unseen enemies in the spiritual realm (Ephesians 6:12). It is a record of how God continues to use the weak and the lowly to move history forward. Just as God used the men and women of generations past, be encouraged that He can also use us to move His plans ahead.



- Churches were first established in the cities and each church in the city had their own bishop. When churches started to spring up in the rural areas as well, the city bishops took charge of these countryside churches as well. So now, **urban bishops became overseers** over multiple congregations.

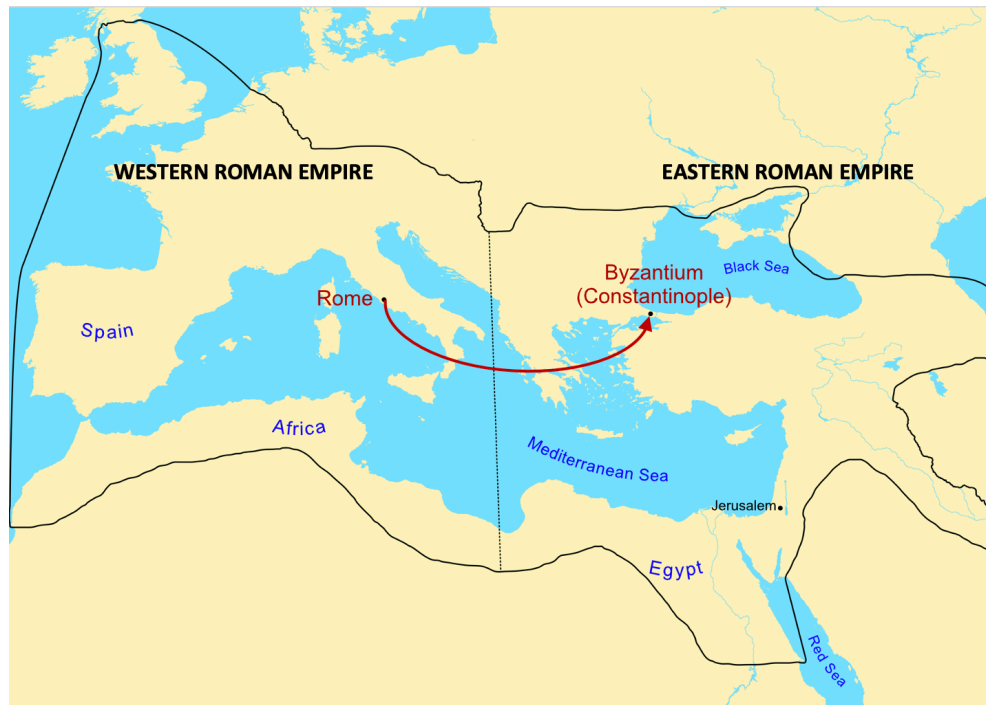


- Gradually, the role of bishop expanded to include priestly mediation between God and the rest of Christian church members. The simple communion became a priestly sacrifice before an altar with the bishop wearing special clothes similar to Old Testament Levitical priests. This idea of borrowing from Old Testament Mosaic law practices was not mentioned at all in the New Testament church letters.
- Around 284, Emperor (his title in Latin was “Augustus”) Diocletian realised the empire was too big to be ruled by a single leader and so he **divided the empire into West and East**. The west was ruled by Augustus Maximian with his vice-ruler, Caesar Constantine. In the east, Diocletian was Augustus and he promoted Galerius to be his vice-emperor (Caesar). From this point on, the Roman Empire was sometimes united under one emperor or co-ruled by two.



## AD 300—400

- After the death of Emperor Galerius of the East (who had succeeded Diocletian and was responsible for one of the worst persecutions of Christians), there was a fight for control of the entire empire (both western and eastern) between four different men: emperors and vice-emperors. **Constantine** won and he ruled the **reunified the western and eastern empires**.
- Emperor Constantine moved the capital of the western Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul, Turkey) in the east. He renamed the city as **Constantinople**.



- **Constantine** was the first Roman Emperor to become Christian (or so it seemed, as there were suspicions about whether he really was a Christian). His reign marked a turning point in history for the Christians.
- He **ended persecution** of Christians and showered a lot of favours on them. Constantine also made **Sunday** the official day of rest and worship. (A later Emperor, Theodosius, made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and banned all pagan worship because he believed that would unify the empire).
- The church started to regard the **Emperor as God's representative** on earth because he changed Christianity from an outlawed and illegal religion to become the religion of the empire.
- Because of Constantine's favour and support, it became **fashionable to be Christian**. Many people flocked to Christianity because they saw it as their "passport" to social, military and political advancement. Unfortunately, many were Christian in name only. They were still rooted in their pagan religions and brought in many pagan ideas, images, superstitions and heresies into the church.

- As the church grew in power, position and prestige, it started to **imitate the ways of the Roman Empire**:

- Church **organisational structure** was modelled after the Roman government.
- Worship services** began to resemble the ways of the royal court (worship of God had always been simple but now incense, used as a sign of respect for the emperor, began to appear in churches).
- Bishops and priests (who used to wear everyday clothes or simple garments) began to **dress** luxuriously like officers of the royal court.
- Churches became bigger, more lavish, and very **luxurious**.
- The **rich and powerful dominated** the life of the church.
- Bishops became **corrupted** by power and wealth, and **competed** for prominent positions.



censer and incense

- Emperors start to intervene in church matters.**

- Because Emperor Constantine granted the church many freedoms, he demanded to **have a say in the affairs of the church** including theological matters. He ruled over his bishops like he did his civil servants and demanded unconditional obedience.
- This started the practice of future emperors getting entangled in church affairs. They started **seeing themselves as head of the Church** and not the church leaders. This led to severe power play in the churches with church leaders trying to manipulate or convince the emperors of the theological position they want enforced.



SPQR banner, emblem of the Roman Republic

- Some Christians saw what was happening to the church as God's blessings of wealth. Others saw all this worldliness, syncretism in church (the mixing of different beliefs), corruption and power struggle as a disgrace to the gospel of Christ. So, **thousands of devoted Christians withdrew from society** to the deserts of Egypt and Syria in pursuit of a simple life of meditation and self-denial, to resist the temptations of money, power and status and to remain faithful to God.

- Some "**monks**" (from the Greek word "monachos", meaning solitary or alone) and nuns lived as hermits.
- However, others found living in the hostile desert environment alone difficult. So they started to live together in communities to help each other. This was the start of the **monasteries**. They would plant food, work, study Scriptures, pray, eat and worship together. Many would also help the sick, poor and orphaned. (Similar communities also started among the nuns).



The Monastery of Saint Anthony in Egypt (established AD300)



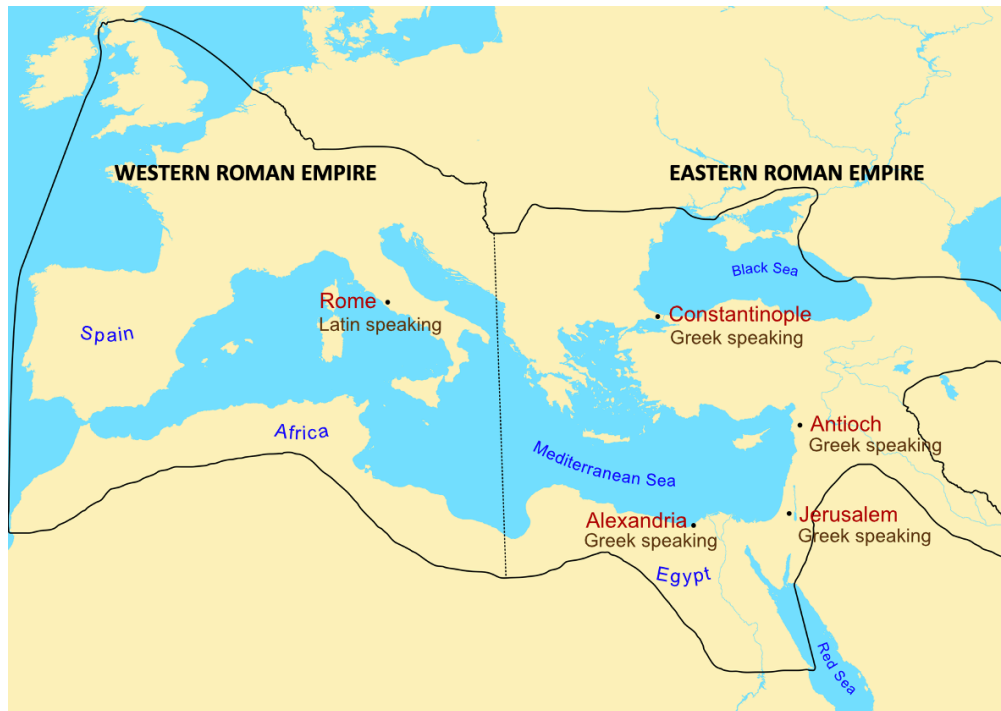
Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai Peninsula, Egypt

- Some monks remained in the monasteries while others travelled the empire founding other monasteries and **spreading the gospel**. It was the monks rather than priests or bishops who kept the spiritual life of the church alive at this time.



Monk with a Roman tonsure (representing Christ's crown of thorns)

- The churches in five main cities became the most prominent and important: Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople (all Greek-speaking), and Rome (Latin-speaking).



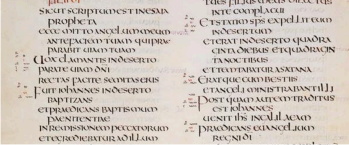
- But a **power struggle** emerged between most of the bishops. In-fighting among leaders and followers was fierce, often violent and sometimes deadly. In the end, the bishops of two churches, **Rome in the west** and **Constantinople in the east**, became the main contenders.



- However, both the churches in Rome and Constantinople developed differently:
  - In **Rome** (west), the **bishops** would become more powerful than the Emperor.
  - In **Constantinople** (east), the **Emperor** would become more powerful than the bishops.

- **Christianity continued growing and impacting countries outside the Roman Empire** including Mesopotamia (Iraq), the Persian Empire (Iran), Edessa (part of Turkey), Armenia, Arabia, Ethiopia, Sudan, India and Central Asia.
  - The work of missionaries, monks and priests contributed to this, but also ordinary Christians, particularly **traders and merchants**. As they worked and travelled using the **Silk Road**, they brought the gospel to the places they traded with.
  - The **missionaries** were also trained not just in theology but medicine, music and other academic subjects. They set up schools, libraries and hospitals alongside churches. Many also helped illiterate tribes develop their own alphabets so they could teach the Scriptures.

## AD 400—500

- Jerome completed the best **Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate**. It was called “Vulgate” because it was the common or “vulgar” language spoken by the people. This became the standard Bible of the Latin-speaking church for many centuries.
 
- The **western part of the Roman Empire came to an end**. The Empire had grown so large it was difficult for the Emperors to maintain power and stability, both politically and economically. They needed a huge army, money and resources to also defend against the invading barbarians from the north. (The Greeks and Romans called anyone who did not speak their language “barbarians”, from the Greek word which means making sounds in a language that one cannot understand.) Due to internal weakening and invasion, the western empire finally collapsed.
  - **West:** The **church survived** the collapse of the western Roman Empire.
    - The church was the only institution that remained and so it took on the role formerly played by the emperor and the government. People began to look to the church for **support, stability and continuity**.



- Gradually, the **bishop of Rome began to assume a new role** in the eyes of the people. The bishops of Rome had always claimed apostolic succession (meaning they had the same authority as the Twelve Apostles) and that they were the direct successors of the apostle Peter whom they claim founded the church in Rome [this does not agree with the Bible]. To them, the bishop of Rome should be the head of the whole church. Many centuries later, it would in fact be the bishop who would crown the emperor.

- The church continued using **Latin** and maintained that it was still the **catholic**, meaning universal, church. And because it was based in **Rome**, they later became known as the **ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**.
- Western Christians gradually came to acknowledge the special authority of the **bishop of Rome**. They started calling him “**pope**”. The word “pope” comes from the Latin word “papa” which means “father”. Christians had actually been calling their bishops “papa” for many years. But later, this title came to be used solely for the bishop of Rome.
- **East**: The Roman Empire in the east, called the Byzantine Empire, as it was based in Constantinople (whose original name was Byzantium), continued to exist for another 1000 years after the fall of the western Roman Empire.
  - In the east, the **Emperor** continued to be priest and king over the eastern church.



- Because the Byzantine Empire saw itself as a continuation of the Roman Empire after the fall of the western part of the empire, the Eastern Church regarded itself as the **rightful church** or the “**orthodox**” church.
- Being more **Greek** in culture and tradition, it came to be known as the **EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH** or the **GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH**.

## AD 500—600

- The Roman Catholic Church in the west saw its mission as **converting its barbarian conquerors** from the north into the Catholic faith. As a result, most of Europe saw a steady conversion to Roman Catholicism.





- **Monasteries become important centres of learning, culture preservation and missions.** The monks, like the Irish and Benedictine monks, spent a lot of time laboriously copying by hand all the surviving great literature from the past, both Christian and non-Christian. These monastic schools became so well known for their scholarship and focus on literacy that thousands of students from other countries flocked to them to study.



- **Christianity spreads to:**

- England
- The Franks (The French)
- Scotland and Europe
- Central Asia via the Silk Road
- Huns, Mongols, Turkish Tribes in Mongolia
- Nubia in Africa

## The Middle Ages: AD 500—1517



### Early Middle Ages (AD 500—1054)

#### AD 600—700

- Muhammad started a **new religion, Islam**, in Arabia. The Islamic empire spread rapidly through violent military conquest across Arabia, the Middle East, Persia and parts of the Byzantine Empire.



Spread of the Muslim Empire by the Mid-Eighth Century (diagram approximate only)

- The **number of Christians in Asia and Africa began to fall** because of Muslim pressures (persecutions and rewards) to convert to Islam.
  - The **Jews** were more adept at resisting, perhaps because of their experience enduring hard times.
  - But large numbers of **Christians converted**. From a position of dominance in previously Christianised nations, they found life too difficult when they were not in a favoured position.
  - The church in Syria, Iraq and Egypt were significantly reduced to a tiny minority. (Today, the small minority of Christians in Egypt continue as the **COPTIC CHURCH**, and in parts of the Middle East, they continued as the **PERSIAN CHURCH** or **CHURCH OF THE EAST**.)



- Before the rise of Islam, the church was centred largely on the Mediterranean. After these churches collapsed, church growth would now come from the west, meaning Europe, including the British Isles, Gaul (France) and Italy. This was how Christianity subsequently became known as a **religion of the West**.

## AD 700—1054

- The **Roman Catholic Church** and the **Eastern Orthodox Church** continued to **drift apart**. The Iconoclast and Filioque controversies worsened the split.

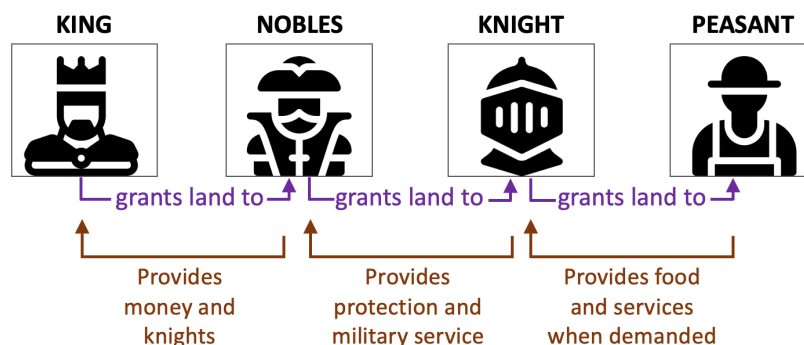


- The Iconoclast Controversy:** The Eastern Orthodox Church regard images or icons (which is the Greek word for “images”) showing Mary, Jesus, biblical characters and Christians who lived after Bible times as windows through which they could see God. Some Christians regarded this as idolatry. The Byzantine emperor at that time issued a policy, known as “iconoclasm” or literally, “icon smashing”, to forbid the use of icons. The Western Church refused to accept this. Throughout the Byzantine Empire, fights and riots broke out lasting more than a century between iconoclasts (destroyers of images) and iconodules (worshippers of images). Many Christians died over this. Finally, a later empress restored the use of icons.



Typical icon wall in a private home

- The Filioque Controversy:** The word “filioque” is Latin for “and the Son”. In one of the earlier church councils, the words “and the Son” were added to the Nicene creed so it would read, “I believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*” (See John 15:26; Acts 2:32–33). The Western Roman Catholic Church started using this. But the Eastern Orthodox Church got angry because they had not been consulted on this. They condemned the Western Church as being heretical. This bitterness went on for centuries and remains a dividing issue between the Western and Eastern Churches today.
- The **Papacy (rule of the pope) declined** because of a succession of weak and corrupt popes. When western Europe entered a time of chaos and the rise of **feudalism**, it was also a very difficult time for the church.



- In the absence of a strong king, nobles were free to plunder church property and treat bishops and monasteries however they liked. Many nobles took it upon themselves to appoint church leadership of their choice. **Church leaders became corrupt** as they became entangled in the struggle for power and wealth within the feudal system.
- In fact, the **selection of popes fell into the hands of influential Italian families**. The Italian feudal lords would fight each other for supremacy and control. The family who gained control would choose the pope. Popes appointed at this time were dominated by the wealthy Italian nobles. Many ungodly men, entirely unfit for any spiritual leadership, were chosen as popes.
- **Popes followed one another in rapid succession**. Several popes were assassinated, poisoned or deposed. For example, in a span of 64 years (between 891 and 955), there were no less than 20 popes.
- The **spiritual life** of the papacy had reached its **lowest point**.
- **Monasteries also reached a low point**.
  - During the feudal period, the church and monasteries **grew wealthy** because devout people, or those who wanted to atone for their sins, would give land to the churches or monasteries. The local abbot (head of the monastery) would rule over and control the donated lands and properties. Also, local lords who went to war would entrust their land and property to a church or monastery. If they did not return from war, their possessions would become the property of the church or monastery.
  - This not only corrupted the life of the church, it also affected the monks and abbots. Many abbots became **corrupted by the lure of wealth and power**. Some became abbots by buying their posts or murdering their rivals, and then they enjoyed lifestyles of ease and wealth.
- **The Cluny Movement**: In the midst of all this degeneration, a small monastery was started in a town of Cluny in France. Led by a succession of able and godly abbots, Cluny became the centre of a vast monastic reform. This Cluny movement spread far and wide to other monasteries and ended up having a major influence in renewing the spiritual life of the Western Church over the next two hundred years. Unfortunately, their effectiveness ended when they too, succumbed to greed and corruption.



## High Middle Ages: The Height of Papal Power (AD 1054–1300)

- Renewal originally started by the Cluny movement started to spill over to the papacy and led to **renewal and growth of the church in Western Europe**. In fact, the church reached the height of power through reforms and the influence of certain popes. The reforms included:
  - **Outlawing simony** (“Simony” comes from the name “Simon”, the man who tried to buy with money the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter and John in Acts 8:18–19; so simony means the practice of buying and selling church positions.)



- **Enforcing celibacy** for all priests. The Bible does not require celibacy for those serving in church. But it became the official requirement of the Roman Catholic Church because the popes wanted to prevent the children of priests from inheriting land that had been donated to the church. They also wanted to stop the practice of priests giving their children positions in the church despite lack of qualifications and training. 
- **Prohibiting “lay investiture”** (ending the practice of allowing monarchs to appoint the popes and returning to the traditional practice of the heads of churches and monasteries and their members nominating the clergy. However, secular rulers still had unofficial input in the process as the emperors were entitled to oaths of loyalty from each of the clergy.)
- The power of the pope reached a new high. The pope’s government was almost like a centralised monarchy. Bishops all over Western Europe swore loyalty to the pope who was supreme in the church. The popes claimed that their position was one that was less than God but more than man so the **pope had authority over all people**, including kings and emperors. Europe appeared united as a Christian empire, known as Christendom. It was under a spiritual head, the pope, who was regarded as sovereign over all, including kings and emperors. The popes used **spiritual penalties as weapons** to enforce their authority including:
  - **Threat of excommunication:** they taught that people needed the Church for justification. If a person was excommunicated, that person would no longer be saved. The threat of not going to heaven frightened people into submission. 
  - **The Interdict:** this was excommunication on a national level. Nations could not conduct public worship, baptise, marry or bury anyone. 
- **New religious movements emerge** in response to the state of the papacy. Even though the Church was growing in power and influence, its spiritual and moral state was dismal. Devoted Christians started movements committed to a life of simplicity following the teachings of the Bible, while rejecting some of the traditions of the Church. The Church responded negatively to these movements, and even though they were not heretical movements, the Church persecuted them as heretics and put many of them to death.
  - **The Medieval Inquisition:** The pope set up a system of religious investigation, to investigate and uncover “heretics” of the Catholic faith, They arrested and tortured people until they confessed; if not, they would be burnt at the stake. 
  - **Spiritual rewards:** The pope promised that church members who turned in heretics or persecuted them would get spiritual rewards such as reduced time in purgatory (explained on page 17). 
  - **Note:** Medieval churchgoers had no qualms about mercilessly persecuting those whom they considered as heretics. The modern idea that faith is a personal choice and everyone has a right to choose what to believe was not how medieval people thought. They believed that a **common faith was what kept a society knitted together** and stable. Any denial of even a single belief was treated as heresy and treason that would lead to instability and problems for the nation. So **fighting heresy was seen as a public duty of a good citizen**. The church had two goals in dealing with heretics: convert them and protect Christian society.

- There was the rise of new group of **preaching monks called the “friars”** (“friar” comes from the Latin word “frater”, meaning “brother”).
  - As towns and cities grew, the number of people suffering from homelessness, poverty and sickness grew. The **church was overwhelmed** and could not minister to all who needed help.
  - In response , groups came together to form the **Mendicant orders** (from the Latin word “mendicant”, which means “begging”). These friars were different from monks. Monks lived in a self-sufficient communities away from society. **Friars lived and worked among the people.** They ministered to the people, served the poor and travelled around preaching and teaching the gospel.
  - People were so attracted to this way of living that **many flocked to join them.**
- Everywhere in North Africa, Egypt and Asia, Christian communities were slowly declining under the centuries of Islamic conquest and rule. During this period, the pope called for the **Crusades**. This was partly a war of self-defence against the Muslim invasion of Europe, and partly an attempt to take back the Holy Land from the Muslim Arabs and Turks. The Crusades were a series of brutal and bloody battles fought between Christians and Muslims for 200 years between 1095–1291. Both sides fought in equally cruel ways.
  - The pope told western Christians that Christians in the east were suffering terribly at the hands of their Muslim oppressors. He called them to take up arms and **free the Holy Land.**
  - To those who would go, the pope **promised a reduced time in purgatory.** To those who should die while on the crusades, he promised immediate access to heaven, skipping purgatory. The pope also issued incentives such as immunity from taxes and debt payment as well as protection of the crusaders’ family and property.
  - The pope’s emotional and stirring speech followed by the pope’s representatives being sent across Europe to spread the message **inspired thousands upon thousands** of nobles, knights, men, women and children to respond to the call.
  - Multiple crusades happened in the course of the 200 years but in the end, overall, they did not result in the long term recovery of the Holy Land.



The West responded to the call to free the East from Muslim oppression

- **Universities begin to replace cathedral schools as the main centres of learning.**

- When the western Roman Empire collapsed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and literacy and learning decreased, the **monasteries had preserved teaching and learning**. Many abbots felt it was their responsibility to educate those in the monasteries so they could read the Scriptures.



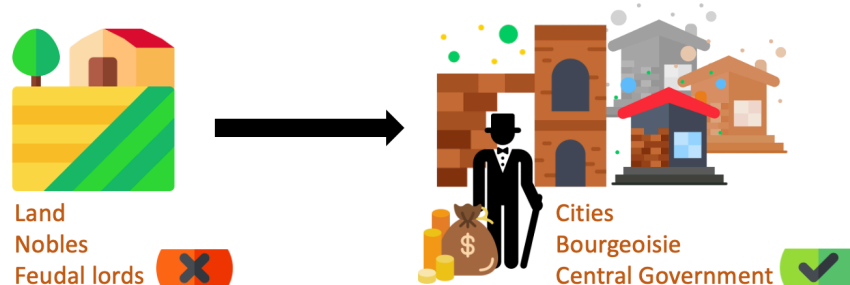
- Later on in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, schools were established in every monastery and **cathedral** because the government recognised the importance of having well-educated people to serve in the church and government.

- By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, **universities** replaced cathedral and monastic schools as the main source of education because students and teachers wanted to band together to focus on certain subjects instead of general study.



## Late Middle Ages: Dawn of the Reformation (AD 1300–1517)

- In Europe, an explosion of intellectual and creative activity resulted in the rediscovery of the knowledge and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. This new cultural movement, known as the **Renaissance**, emerged.
- Significant changes happened economically and politically that led to the **rise of nations** (as opposed to feudal lords) and a **shift in power from the pope to kings**.
  - Western Europe was moving away from its feudal past. With the growth of cities, money and products were now more important than land. A new middle class emerged: they were the rich and powerful tradesmen, merchants and bankers. Called the “**bourgeoisie**”, they clashed with feudal lords because they wanted a strong centralised government to protect trade and secure their wealth. They also focused on expanding their markets which led them to explore the world. Thus, the power of the kings grew.



- At the same time, the idea of **different nations run by their own kings** began replacing the old idea of an empire with the different feudal lords answering to the emperor. Wars, plagues and death also leaned people more towards a strong, central government.
- **Corruption in the churches and the monasteries** continued. In-fighting among the religious leaders also continued. The lifestyles of the popes and leaders resembled the lives of princes, with many spending fortunes on expensive wardrobes, banquets, gold and silver plates, etc. They were more interested in the art and culture of the Renaissance than caring for the church. This extravagant lifestyle and wrong focus was not just at the top but also at the lower ranks of the church.

- **Johann Gutenberg** invented the **first modern printing press** around 1440. This paved the way for books to be cheaply produced and ideas to be quickly shared.



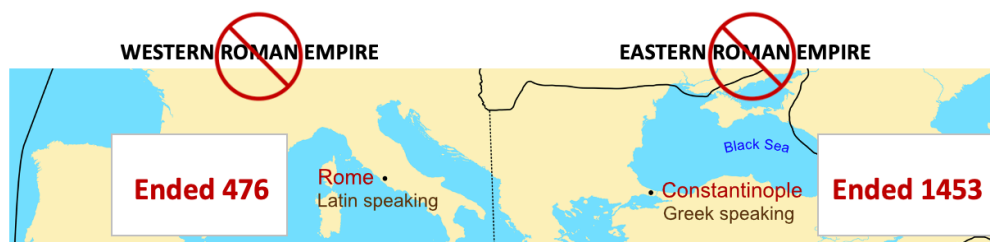
- **John Wycliff** (1320—1384)
  - He criticised the wealth and excesses of the popes and called for a return to a focus of on what the apostles focused on: the **Bible as the only source of authority** and a simple lifestyle.
  - He also translated the first full **English Bible** (from the Latin Vulgate done by Jerome) because he believed every Christian should study the Bible for themselves.

**Example of the difference in translation of John 3:16  
between Wycliff's Bible and the King James Version**

**Wycliffe (Middle English):** For God louede so the world, that he gaf his oon bigetun sone, that ech man that bileueth in him perische not, but haue euerlastynge lijf.

**King James Version:** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

- **Desiderius Erasmus** (1466—1536)
  - He criticised the excesses of the church leadership and called Christians to go back to first-century faith.
  - He produced the **Greek New Testament** (first printed in 1516, one year before the Protestant Reformation), because he wanted a Bible that everyone could read.
- Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople and **end the Byzantine Empire** (1453).





## The Modern Church: AD 1517—2000



### The Protestant Reformation (AD 1517—1648)

- **Spiritual rot** had already set into the Roman Catholic Church for many years.
  - Popes, bishops and priests were more interested in the arts and culture, amassing wealth and enjoying a leisurely life, rather than teaching and spreading the gospel message.
  - Many clergy had affairs openly even though they were not supposed to marry.
  - Many clergy were also illiterate.
- Those active within the church had earlier and for many years already been calling for change because they believed that the **teachings of the Roman Catholic Church were not in line with the Bible**. These became even clearer to them when more and more people started studying Scriptures for themselves in the original languages and in languages they understood. The work of Wycliff and Erasmus were critical in helping in this area because they made God's Word accessible to more people.
- What were the **teachings that were being questioned?** Teachings on what was called "**holy tradition**" that had come to be accepted as key truths or doctrines by the Roman Catholic Church. They included:
  - **Purgatory**. This was the place where believers went to for a period of time after death, so they could pay off their sins before they could enter heaven.
  - **Transubstantiation**. The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper (communion) changed into the real body and real blood of Christ when the priest said the sacramental words. 
  - **Indulgences**: This was a full or partial "discount" given on the time a person needed to suffer in purgatory to pay for their sins. By paying an indulgence, a person could be let off completely or let off early from punishment in purgatory and go straight to heaven. A person could buy indulgences for themselves or even for the dead. Buying indulgences became very popular as people found it easier to just pay off their sin with money. 
  - **Penance**: All Christians were supposed to confess their sins at least once a year to the priest. The priest would then declare the person's sins forgiven by God. The priest would also decide what penance, or amends, the person would have to make. The penance could include saying a fixed number of 

prayers, fasting, giving alms, going on a pilgrimage (or crusade in the 11<sup>th</sup> century), or paying a fixed sum of money.

- **The pope:** He was the direct apostolic successor of Peter and inherited Peter’s authority.



## The Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther, German (1483–1546)

- It started when an **archbishop, Albert of Brandenburg**, wasn’t satisfied with his allotted jurisdiction. He wanted to be archbishop over a larger area. He wanted to buy this position so he made a deal with Pope Leo X: Albert would **sell indulgences** in his own home territory and share the proceeds with the pope. The pope would get money and Albert would get the money he needed to buy the position he wanted. The pope agreed.

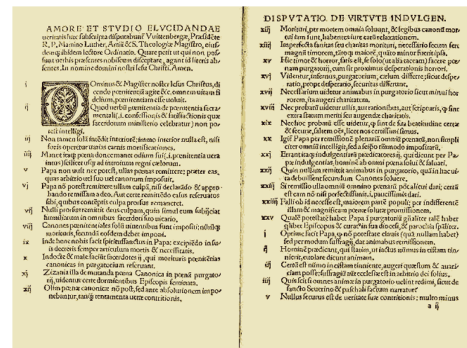
- Albert got himself a very good salesman, a Dominican friar called Johann Tetzel. Tetzel was an excellent **“salesman”** and sold an obscene amount of indulgences.

- The claims made by Tetzel angered **Martin Luther**, a monk and theology professor, so much that Luther felt it was time for a scholarly debate on what the Bible actually teaches. In 1517, he wrote a list of **95 statements** (called 95 theses) that he believed the Roman Catholic Church got wrong and nailed it to the door of the Castle Church (this was the way to invite debate in those days because the door was also the university’s bulletin board).



Martin Luther

- While there were 95 areas of disagreement listed, Luther had the most problems with **three of them:** the pope’s power to forgive sins, the selling of indulgences and the true treasure of the church which he believed to be the gospel message of salvation and not the good works of Jesus and the saints. So the statements he wrote stated what he believed the Bible taught.



Ninety-five Theses

- **#6:** The pope has no power to remit any guilt except declaring and warranting it to have been remitted by God.
- **#21:** The preachers of indulgences who say that by the indulgences of the pope a man is freed and saved from all punishment are in error.
- **#62:** The true treasure of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.



- Although Martin Luther wrote these statements in Latin, they were quickly translated into German by others and copies were made, printed and **distributed all over Germany and Europe**.

- The pope was not happy with Luther but after two events where Luther debated with a cardinal sent by the pope and a fellow professor who was vehemently opposed to Luther, it became clear that there could be **no reconciliation** between Luther and the Roman Catholic Church. Luther


had rejected both the pope and the church councils as supreme. The pope saw Martin Luther as a heretic and on June 15, 1520, sent out a “papal bull” (which is a public decree issued by the pope) to **excommunicate** Luther. The Roman Catholic Church was now **very divided**: those in support of Luther and those opposed to him.




Pope's bull against the errors of Martin Luther

- That same year, Luther wrote **three Reformation Treaties**:
  - The first was to the German **nobility** asking them to reform the church because the clergy were indifferent to the sorry state of the church.
  - The second was to the **clergy** and in it, he rejected the seven sacraments of the church. He argued that there are only three: baptism, the Lord's Supper and penance (but later, he rejected penance as well). He also said that the bread and wine should be given for all believers (the general believer at that time only had access to the bread).
  - The third was a summary of **justification by faith** and the implications on Christian living.
- Later on, while hiding from his opponents, Luther **created a German Bible by first translating Erasmus's Greek New Testament**. He really wanted his people to be able to read the Word of God for themselves without relying on the interpretations of the priests. Then he worked with other translators to translate the Hebrew text of the Old Testament into German to get a complete German Bible.
- In 1525, against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther **got married**, something that Catholic priests and monks were not allowed to do. When he got married, many priests, monks and nuns also followed his lead and got married. 
- Years later, in 1530, Luther's closest friend and co-worker, Philip Melancthon, presented a statement of beliefs. This became known as the **Augsburg Confession**. Till this day, the Augsburg Confession remains the official statement of the **LUTHERAN** church's beliefs.
- Three of the beliefs that Luther clearly articulated are at the heart of **Protestant beliefs** today. They are:
  - **Justification by faith** (salvation cannot be earned by works but is a gift of God received by faith in Jesus Christ).
  - The **Bible is the ultimate authority** for Christians (not some form of shared authority with the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and their leaders). 
  - **All Christians**, clergy and laity, are the same: clergy are no holier than laity; the only difference is the role each plays.
- However, Luther retained and imported into Lutheranism all the **Roman Catholic rites and practices that did not contradict with the Bible**. He did not have enough time to work through each and every one as the biggest issue he was focused on was justification by faith.
- The Lutheran Church and its beliefs **spread** to other countries like Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Central Europe, England, Italy and Spain.

## The Protestant Reformation: Ulrich Zwingli, Swiss (1484—1531)

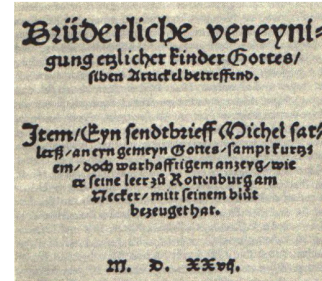
- It started when Switzerland was not even a nation yet. At that time, Switzerland was a collection of city-states known as “cantons”. Zwingli was a priest in Zurich and in **studying the Bible** for himself, he came to the same conclusion that Luther did, even though he had not read any of Luther’s writings. So what God did in Switzerland **happened in parallel** to what He did through Luther in Germany.
- 
- Ulrich Zwingli
- Zwingli was very disturbed by the corruption and abuses in the Roman Catholic Church and he preached boldly about the need for the church to return to its roots in New Testament teaching. In fact, he taught that the **Bible alone should be the source of Christian practice and belief**. He said that anything that was not explicitly taught in the Bible ought to be rejected. Because of this, his reforms transformed Zurich:
    - He had statues and icons taken down from churches
    - He had organs destroyed
    - He introduced a new and simple worship service
    - Congregational singing was no longer accompanied by musical instruments
    - Communion of both bread and wine was given to both clergy and laity
    - Priests, monks and nuns could now marry.
  - Zwingli’s reformation spread quickly and many Swiss cantons and also German cities adopted his teachings. However, many other Swiss cantons resisted and remained Roman Catholic. This led to **civil war** and Zwingli died in battle. After his death, Zwingli and his movement became overshadowed by a Frenchman who came after him: John Calvin.

## The ANABAPTISTS

- This group of people started off as **supporters of Zwingli’s reforms**. But as they studied the Scriptures for themselves, they saw how very different the church of their times was in comparison with the New Testament believers. They came to the conclusion that Zwingli **did not make enough changes** in the reform.
  - In particular, they believed the Bible clearly taught that a person could only be justified and become a member of the true church by making a **personal decision to believe** in Christ. Therefore, they **rejected infant baptism** because a person could not become a Christian just by being born into a Christian family and being baptised as an infant. Instead, they started baptising only adults who had made a confession of faith. In this way, they “re-baptised” people. Their opponents therefore started calling them the “Anabaptist” (meaning “re-baptise”).
- 
- The Anabaptists insisted that the Word of God should be the only rule of faith and focused greatly on **Bible study**. Their hope was to restore the church to what it was like in earlier centuries, which was a family of believers. Unlike Luther and Zwingli, they **objected to the**

**state church** (the official church of a nation or state that was supported by civil authority). In 1525, when Zurich stopped them from gathering and spreading their views, they broke off and started their own church. They were the **first “free” church** (that is, free from state ties) in the modern era.

- The Anabaptists faced violent persecutions because both the Catholics and Protestants considered them heretics. Within four years, the movement was practically destroyed. But their views had spread far into German-speaking Europe. In 1527, the remaining scattered Anabaptist groups gathered to summarise their beliefs in what is called the **Schleitheim Confession** (named after the town they were in). The six point confession clarified crucial points where the Anabaptists differed from either the state churches of Luther and Zwingli or their own fringe groups.



Title page of the Schleitheim Confession

- Today, many of their beliefs are accepted by other Christians. They are the forerunners of practically all modern protestants who believe that **the church and the state should be separate**.
- The direct descendants of the Anabaptists are the **AMISH, MENNONITES** and the **HUTTERITES**.

## The Protestant Reformation: John Calvin, French (1509—1564)

- John Calvin was a Frenchman and theology scholar who fled to Basel in Switzerland in 1534 when he was caught up in anti-Catholic incidents in Paris. There, at 25 years of age, he wrote a handbook for theological students called “**Institutes of the Christian Religion**”. It was the clearest, most logically laid out, readable explanation of the Protestant beliefs of that time. He became very famous because of that.



John Calvin

- Calvin was invited to move to Geneva to help the Protestant cause there. Under Calvin, **Geneva was transformed**.
  - Calvin believed that every aspect of daily life should be lived in obedience to God, both secular and religious. So he drafted **basic laws for the city that covered both the secular and religious**. He convinced city leaders to establish this moral code which included forbidding drinking, dancing and gambling.
  - He opened an academy that later became the **University of Geneva**. Students from all over Europe came and studied theology while living a disciplined lifestyle. Later, many became pastors in France, Scotland, England and other Eastern European countries. Calvin’s theological influence spread wide. Churches that followed his teachings became known as “Reformed” or “Calvinists” churches. They include:
    - Netherlands: **DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH**.
    - Scotland: **PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** of Scotland (the roots of Modern Presbyterianism).

**Note:** The name “Presbyterian” comes from the type of church structure used to govern local churches. The **Presbyterian** type had representative assemblies of elders, called “presbyteries”, governing their churches. “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word “presbyteros” for “elder.” Other types of structures are:



- The **Congregational** structure. This refers to individual churches governed by their own congregations.
- The **Episcopal** (from the Greek word “episkopos” which means “overseer”) structure. They have bishops with authority over the churches in a specific area, or diocese.



(In the Bible, “presbyteros” and “episkopos” are used interchangeably. It is only about this time in church history that different churches used these words differently.)

## The Reformation in England: The **ANGLICAN** Church

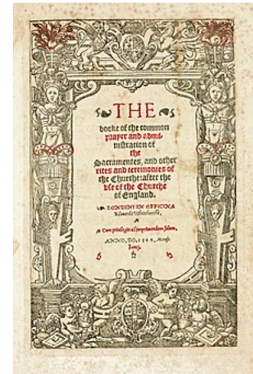
- The Reformation in England did not start from theological differences. Rather, it started because **King Henry VIII** (1491—1547) wanted to **annul his marriage** with Catherine, his first wife. The pope was reluctant to help him so Henry declared that the Church of England was no longer under the pope; rather Henry would now be the **Head of the Church in England** (this was passed in Parliament in 1534). This meant he could annul his marriage; but it also meant the complete split of the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church.
- Although Henry broke with Rome, his **intention was to have an English Catholic Church** (versus a Roman Catholic Church). He very much believed in the Catholic faith and did not want to change anything. (Because of that, the pope gave him the title of “Defender of the Faith”, a title still carried by English monarchs today).



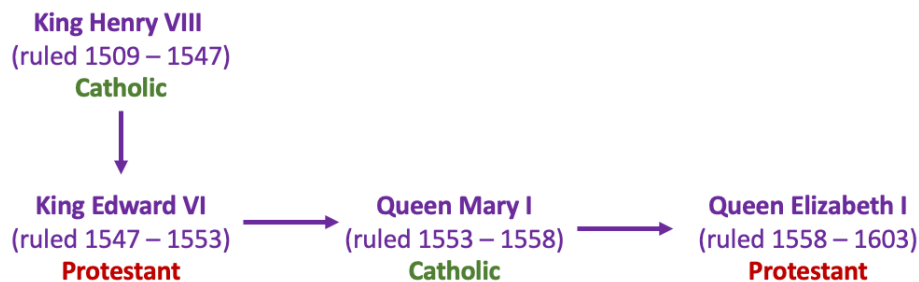
- However, many of the clergy in the Church of England and therefore under Henry, tried to move England towards Protestantism. This was because for years, many had already been opposed to the Roman papacy and its behaviour. However, they couldn’t do much until Henry

died and his son **Edward VI** became king. At that point in time, **Thomas Cranmer**, archbishop of Canterbury, encouraged Edward to bring England into the Protestant Reformation by ensuring that the new Church of England — the **ANGLICAN** Church — was Protestant in character.

- Cranmer wrote the “**Book of Common Prayer**” which was a collection of prayers and liturgies for use in churches. He had simplified and condensed the Latin services of the medieval church into one English-language volume. This became the official service book for the priests and the congregation. Till today, Anglicans all over the world use prayer books that are based on Cranmer’s book. In 1553, Cranmer also produced the **42 articles** (statements) which defined the faith and beliefs of the Church of England.
- When Edward VI died, his half-sister, **Mary I**, took the throne. She was deeply Catholic and tried to force England back into Catholicism. She had those who refused to renounce Protestantism, including Cranmer, executed.



Title page: Book of Common Prayer (1549)



- When her half-sister **Elizabeth I** took the throne, she tried to bring peace to the very fractured country by compromising between the Catholics and the Protestants. It was at this time that the Anglican Church assumed its distinctive character which was neither Roman Catholic nor Reformed. They introduced the **39 Articles** (edited from Cranmer’s 42) that included the belief that the Bible was the final authority and there were only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. So, the **Anglican beliefs were essentially Protestant, but carefully written in a way that both Catholics and Protestants would agree to**. Because of what Queen Elizabeth I did, many consider her to be the true “founder” of Anglicanism.

## The **PURITANS**

- Many English Christians had fled when Queen Mary I (nicknamed “Bloody Mary” by Protestants) was persecuting and executing Protestants. While away in other parts of Europe, they were greatly influenced by Calvinism. When they returned to England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, they were unhappy that the **Anglican Church contained so many Catholic elements**. Among other things, they insisted that Christians should live a simple life guided solely by the teachings of the Bible and the selection of clergy should be by the congregation and not the monarch. They were given the name “Puritans” because they **wanted to purify the Anglican Church**.

- Some Puritans became impatient with the lack of change in the Anglican Church and so:
  - Some left the Anglican Church to worship on their own. They were known as the **Separatists** because they wanted the church separated from the state.
  - Some decided to seek religious freedom in the New World (America) so they set sail in 1620. They became known as the **Pilgrim Fathers** in America.

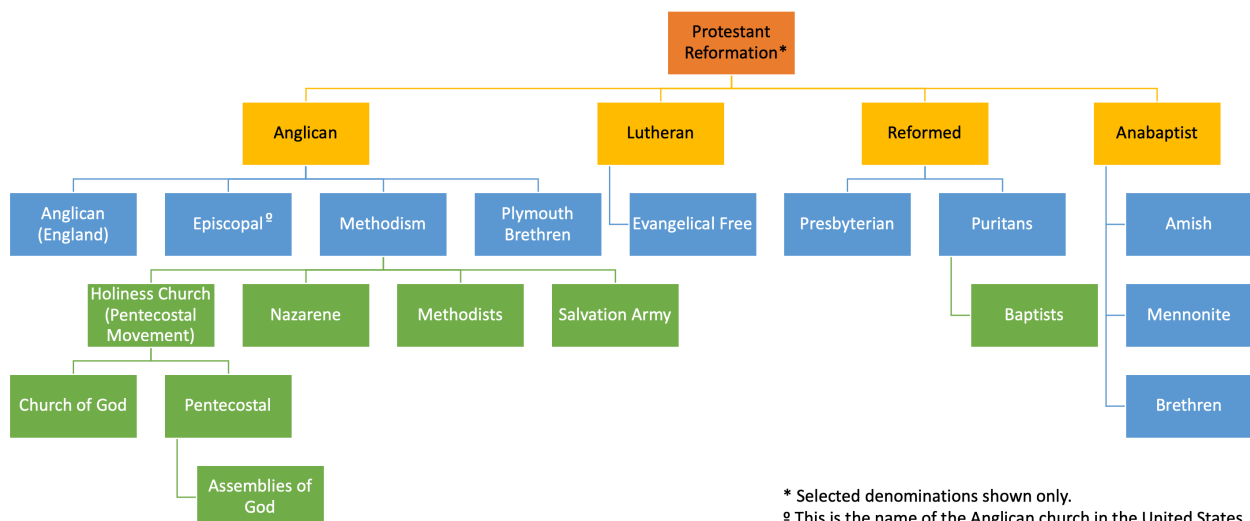
## The Response of the Roman Catholic Church

- There was an **internal renewal** and “**counter-reformation**” within the Roman Catholic Church.
  - Before the Protestant Reformation, there were already Catholics who longed for **renewed spirituality** in the Church. They started refocusing on change, increased focus on teaching, learning and social services.
  - When the Protestant Reformation started, the pope convened a new general council and also approved the starting of several new religious orders within the Roman Catholic Church including the Society of Jesus, also known as the **Jesuits**. The job of the Jesuits was to stop the spread of Protestantism by winning people back to the Catholic faith.
  - The Jesuits **attacked the Protestant understanding of justification by faith**. They taught that this belief would lead to congregations living immoral lives. Instead, they emphasised works. They also attacked other teachings of the Protestants.
- The differences between the Catholics and Protestants led to great struggle and **wars** over the years.



## The Protestant Church after the Reformation

The following chart shows selected denominations stemming from the Reformation. This is to be distinguished from cults which is discussed later.






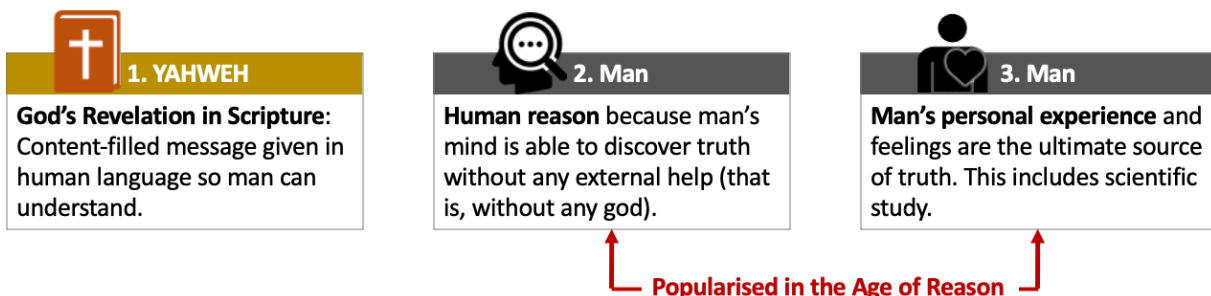
But how did the different denominations under the four main groups come about?

- Some came about because they emphasised certain aspects of church life. For example:
  - **BAPTISTS** are so named because they emphasise the importance of the believers' **baptism** through immersion. They do not baptise infants.
  - **EVANGELICAL FREE** churches are congregational in their governance structure. This means that each church is governed and supported by its own congregation. Although they typically have a senior pastor and a board of elders, the pastors and elders receive their authority by the **vote of the congregation**.
- Others came about through certain movements examined below.

## The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: The Age of Reason (The Enlightenment)

- Although the Protestants shared common beliefs, each Protestant group also became zealous to defend their teachings against one another. They developed their **own confessions of faith**, and from their congregations they **demand total agreement** on issues like what was biblical truth that all Christians could not compromise on, as well as matters of secondary importance. This fighting among the Protestants, and collectively, with the Roman Catholics, led to **deterioration in the spiritual life** of Christians as more focus was put on arguing than on anything else including their relationship with God, love, grace and unity. 
- Up till this time in history, there was general acceptance among Christians that the main source of truth was God's revelation as found in Scripture. But as Christians grew weary of the infighting, they began to **look for alternatives in their search for truth and tolerance**.
- At the same time, as advances in scientific discoveries began to open up new ways of looking at the world, philosophers started to focus on human reason to answer fundamental questions about life. Reason, the ability to think and the use of logic, began to grow in importance as the way to attain truth. These people believed that **knowledge and truth could be attained from human reason alone** with no need for God.
- Other philosophers believed that real knowledge came from our sensory experience: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. They believed that **personal human experience was sufficient for mankind to discover knowledge and truth**. They too, rejected God's revelation as the source of truth.

### Sources of Truth



- Historians called this era the age of “The Enlightenment”, as if suggesting that people before this time did not know truth and were “unenlightened”.
- Some within the church outright rejected these philosophies. Others bought into them but, unwilling to give up on God, these promoted a “**rational Christianity**” where they tried to reinterpret the Bible to fit with these philosophies. Still others rejected God’s revelation and turned to mankind as the source of truth.
- Some Christians, disillusioned with what had happened with Christianity, sought “**transformed hearts**” instead. These Christians felt that Christianity had become “dead” orthodoxy. They were eager to refocus on inner spiritual lives and recover the genuineness of faith that would be expressed in piety and works of charity. One such movement was “**Pietism**”. Pietism focused on seeking a personal relationship with Jesus. To cultivate this relationship, Christians would meet regularly in **small groups** for prayer and Bible study. They were also very involved in the community: they set up schools, served the poor and needy, and went about doing missionary work. Pietism laid the groundwork for the eventual rise of evangelical Christianity.



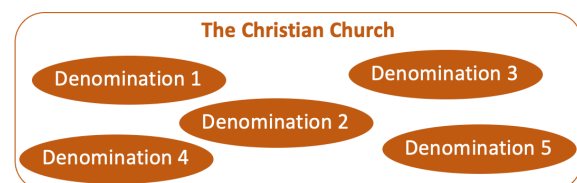
## The **METHODISTS**

- John Wesley was an Anglican minister who, early on in his life, led a group of earnest students dedicated to frequently observing Holy Communion, the serious study of the Bible and prisons ministry. This group came to be known as the “Methodists” because of their “**methodical**” **devotion and study**. He was inspired by the work of a Pietist group and later adopted many of their practices into his own small group meetings. However, Wesley did not have a personal relationship with Christ until much later when he experienced feelings of grace and forgiveness for his sin. His brother, Charles had a separate experience around the same time.
- With this newfound excitement in spiritual matters, the brothers later partnered with George Whitefield, a gifted preacher. Their work was initially done within the Anglican Church. However, it later **separated into its own denomination** in both Britain and North America.

## The Acceptance of Denominations: Started in North America

- A significant change happened at this time as well. In Europe, Christians did not have the freedom to hold differing views. The Catholics and the Reformers zealously suppressed anyone who did not conform to their doctrines. In search of religious freedom, the Puritans fled to the New World (America). Gradually, as more English and Europeans arrived in the New World, there was growing religious diversity. The Christians there soon realised that continuing to be intolerant towards the each other’s teachings was unproductive. This led to a growing **acceptance of “denominations”**.

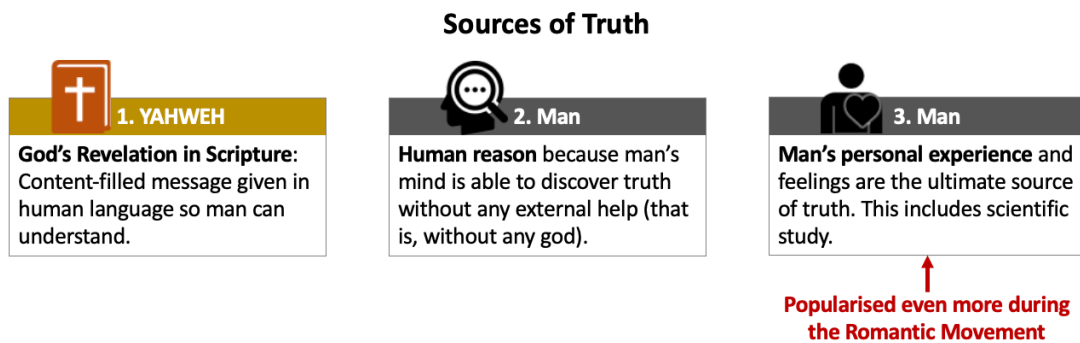
- The word “denomination” implies that the Christian group is called or denominated by a particular name but all **are members of the larger group: the Christian church**. North America had developed a Christian identity that



was different from Europe. This was an eye-opener for Europe which saw that the Americans had a form of religious freedom not available in any European kingdom. This would later impact how they too organised and saw themselves.

## The 19<sup>th</sup> Century: New Challenges

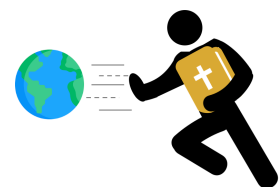
- The Age of Reason (“The Enlightenment”) of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, a prominent Protestant theologian called Friedrich Schleiermacher was drawn to the **Romantic movement**, which came about partly as a reaction to the cold reasoning and order of the Age of Reason. Romantics stressed emotions and feelings as the source of truth. Taking this position, Schleiermacher insisted that **Christianity should be based on the believer’s feelings** and not on rational proofs or biblical authority. This opened the door to the elevation of feelings above biblical truth.



- As a result, this led to a “liberalism in theology” or **Liberal theology**. This way of thinking rejected the Bible as the ultimate authority. Instead, the methodologies of modern science, other disciplines and Christian experiences were used as the starting point for understanding things. This led to a reinterpretation of the truth of the Bible. Liberal theology came up with ideas such as: the Bible is not “God-breathed” and contains errors; Genesis is not real; people are not helpless sinners; the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ are false; hell is not real, etc. Compared to the past, when Christians viewed God’s Word like a meadow where every part was full of God’s truth, liberal thinking viewed God’s Word as a dung heap that man had to dig through to find the gold nuggets of truth. In liberal thinking, mankind becomes the ultimate authority on what is truth.



- Amid these challenges were Christians who continued to hold to **evangelical theology**. The term “evangelical” comes from the Greek word, “euangelion” which means gospel or good news and it refers to the salvation message of Christ. These Christians believe that Scripture is the ultimate authority and they hold to the essentials of biblical truth, such as the death and resurrection of Christ; individuals must have personal faith in Christ; and mission work is an important part of Christianity. Evangelical Christians could be found within different denominations.



- Evangelical Christians from different denominations banded together to lead the **fundamentalist movement**. These Christians asserted that the essentials, or fundamentals, of the Christian faith could not be compromised. What they were holding to was not a new belief. Rather, these Christians were going back to what the church had traditionally believed all along. Later on, a liberal professor at Harvard University, Kirsopp Lake, admitted that liberalism had departed from traditional Christian beliefs. Even though he personally disagreed with fundamentalism, he said, “It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology to suppose that Fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind. Fundamentalism is the partial and uneducated **survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians.**” He continued, “The Fundamentalist may be wrong, I think he is, but it is we who have departed from the tradition and not him, and I am sorry for anyone who tries to argue with the fundamentalists on the basis of authority. **The Bible and the corpus theologicum [body of theology] of the church is on the Fundamentalist side.**”

### Differences between Liberal and Historical Christianity

	Liberal Christianity	Historical Christianity
Essence of Christianity	Morality	Christ's redemption of mankind*
Scripture	Mythology	God's Word
Christ	Example to be followed	God to be worshipped
God	Love	Love and Justice
Ultimate authority	Experience and reason	Bible
Man	Essentially good	Morally fallen
Sin	The remains of perverse animal instincts	Rebellion against God
Salvation	Good works	Faith in Christ
Church	Concerned with world and society (Social Gospel)	Concerned with the salvation of souls
Eschatology (How it ends)	No hell, all “saved”	God's judgment, Believers saved

\* It is more accurate to say: “The worship and glorification of God”.

- Other challenges during this time include the rise of Charles Darwin and the **theory of evolution**, the **Industrial Revolution** and the accompanying **new social problems** of poverty, disease, alcoholism, gambling, exploitation of child labour, slavery, poor health and sanitation, and education being limited to the elites of society. **Socialism** and **marxism** and **communism** also arose as alternatives to religion.
- The Anglican Church was initially slow to respond to the overwhelming needs of its communities, so different evangelicals from different denominations arose to form voluntary societies to address these needs and to spread the gospel. One of these societies was **THE SALVATION ARMY**. Started by an ex-Methodist preacher and his wife, they organised their movement along military lines, so they had uniforms, army ranks, etc.



- The **Sunday School Movement** which started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to educate the illiterate children who worked in factories continued in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These children would be taught to read and thereafter, taken to church and taught the Bible. This practice soon became a part of British missions and was exported worldwide.



## Cults

- New cults started during this time as well. A cult is a group that teaches doctrines that, if believed, will cause a person to **remain unjustified** or unsaved. Christian cults **deny fundamental truths** of Christianity while still claiming to be Christian. The two most common teachings of Christian cults are that Jesus is not God and that salvation is not by faith alone. Oftentimes, they also **elevate other writings** as having authority over Scripture. Many cults simply recycle old heresies that the early church had already settled. In the following table are several examples.

	Jehovah’s Witnesses	Mormons
<b>Origins</b>	Started by an 18-year old student named Charles Taze Russell who rejected biblical doctrine.	Started by Joseph Smith, Jr. who claimed that as a teenager, he saw an angel called Moroni who told him the Church was wrong and gave him a book written on plates of gold that contained the truth. (Joseph’s family was involved in occult practices both before and after this alleged vision.)
<b>Scripture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Came up with their own translation of the Bible called the “<b>New World Translation</b>” which changed the meaning of many Bible passages.</li> <li>• Claimed that founder Charles Taze Russell’s writings, their in-house <b>Watchtower</b> magazine and the <b>Awake!</b> publications are supreme over the Bible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed their own translation of the Bible called the <b>Joseph Smith Translation</b>, which changed the meaning of nearly 4,000 Bible verses.</li> <li>• Added Joseph Smith’s writings (The <b>Book of Mormon</b>, The Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants).</li> <li>• Added “<b>modern prophets</b>”.</li> </ul>
<b>Teachings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reject the Trinity.</li> <li>• God is not all-knowing.</li> <li>• Jesus is not God, but a created being.</li> <li>• Deny the resurrection.</li> <li>• Salvation is based on works.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recycled heresies include:</b> Ebionism, Arianism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reject the Trinity.</li> <li>• The Heavenly Father was once a created man who earned his status as god through obedience. He has flesh and blood and lives on a planet near the star Kolob.</li> <li>• The Father has one wife with whom he created spirit children.</li> <li>• Jesus is not God. He is the firstborn spirit child. His brother Lucifer is the second born.</li> <li>• Jesus came about through normal sexual union between the Father and the virgin Mary.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recycled heresies include:</b> Ebionism, Arianism, Montanism</p>

## Protestant Missionary Movements

- The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a rise in modern missions with interdenominational missionary societies and denominations sending missionaries to different parts of the world. The **Evangelical Movement** along with advances in technology and transport inspired many protestants in Europe and North America to **evangelise the world**. The missionaries brought the gospel along with literacy programmes, hospitals, orphanages, and introduced public health measures and other humanitarian services. Some well-known missionaries and where they served include William Carey (India), Robert Morrison, James Hudson Taylor and Lottie Moon (China), Adoniram Judson (Burma), and David Livingston (Africa).



## The 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Challenges of Modernity

- This century started optimistically with greater increase in wealth and technology worldwide as well as Christianity becoming a global faith. But the **two world wars** and the **Great Depression** had great impact and caused significant changes in the power and influence of the western world.
- Secularisation** rose significantly. This is the **move away from religion** and the greater general acceptance of nationalism, individualism and communism. Communism promised a better life for the many who were in great suffering after the wars and the depression. Churches and Christians suffered greatly as a result of the rise of communism.
- The Protestant church continued to be **spilt** between those who hold to liberal theology and those who held to the traditional beliefs of the faith.



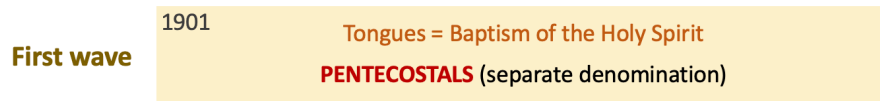
## The Impact of Methodism

- In John Wesley's life and ministry, he had taught accurately about justification by faith. However, he also taught the idea of a "**second blessing**". The Bible does not use this term at all, but he explained that the second blessing is an act of God whereby a believer is granted deliverance from both inward and actual sin while on earth.
- After his death, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some Methodist ministers including Phoebe Palmer, took this idea further and taught about "entire sanctification". This is the idea that people can achieve perfect holiness or **sinless perfection while on earth** in their fallen bodies. This came to be known as the **Holiness movement**. People get "entire sanctification" via a spiritual experience that those in the Holiness movement called the "second work of grace" or the "second blessing". This teaching is not found in Scripture.
- Drawing from the teachings of Wesley and the Holiness movement, the **CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE** or the Nazarene Church was started. They were the first denomination that taught the reality of "entire sanctification" along with the "second blessing". Most of the churches in the Methodist movement at that time taught some form of this belief, but the Nazarenes formalised it and made it a key feature of their denomination.

## The **PENTECOSTALS** and the Charismatic Movement

- Pentecostalism started from the Holiness Movement. Agnes Ozman was a Methodist student at Charles Parham's bible school when she started speaking in tongues, which at that time, they still believed was the ability to speak in a known human language. Parham then associated the **baptism of the Holy Spirit** with this **speaking in tongues**. Another of Parham's students, William Seymour, later led the Azusa Street Revival which saw many others speaking in tongues. This event is often associated with the start of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. (Parham and Seymour later parted ways as Seymour believed many of the manifestations at Azusa Street were of the flesh, or perhaps even demonic.) Nevertheless, **the first wave** of this movement resulted in Pentecostals starting a separate denomination.

### The History of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in America



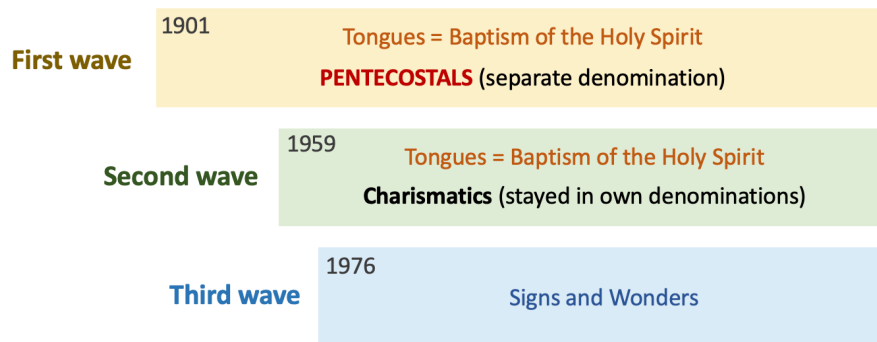
- There are three main divisions within the Pentecostal movement.
  - The first division originally came out of the Holiness movement churches (Methodist and Nazarene). They define the three steps in the life of a believer as: (i) justification; (ii) the second blessing, where a believer no longer practises sin; and (iii) baptism of the Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues and also other signs. These churches are called the **CHURCH OF GOD**.
  - The second division are those who came from a Baptist background but were heavily influenced by the Holiness Movement. They are the **ASSEMBLIES OF GOD**.
  - The third division is the **Oneness Pentecostals**. They later formed the **United Pentecostal Church** and the **Apostolic Pentecostal Church**. They are not regarded as Christians by many because they reject the Trinity.
- Some Pentecostals use the words "second blessing" to refer to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is described variously as the crucial blessing to be sought, the ultimate experience to strive for, and the greatest achievement of the Christian.

### The History of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in America



- The **second wave** of the movement involved Christians who already belonged to different denominations but who also believe in the baptism of the Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Unwilling to leave their denominations, they remained. This led to the rise of **Charismatics within the different denominations** such as Charismatic Baptists, Charismatic Lutherans, etc. The word “charismatic” comes from the combination of the Greek words “charis” (meaning grace) and “mata” (meaning gifts). It emphasises the manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The movement is most known for its acceptance of speaking in tongues, divine healing, and prophecies as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is also known for its teaching on the “Word of Faith” (or the “Name it and Claim it” teaching).

### The History of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in America



- The **third wave** is sometimes known as the “Signs and Wonders Movement”. This began when a group of Pentecostal teachers insisted on some teachings that their church did not agree with. This led to a church split and the creation of the **Vineyard Church**. These teachers claimed this was a new moving of the Holy Spirit among evangelicals who, for one reason or another, have chosen not to identify with either the Pentecostals or Charismatics. It was also known as the **Neo-Charismatic Movement**. Several of their key teachings include “**power evangelism**”, which is the idea that the preaching of the gospel must always be accompanied by signs and wonders in order for people to respond in faith. They claimed that God was giving new revelation today through **modern-day apostles and prophets**, so the authority of these apostles and prophets were above the written Scripture. Personal experience also played a significant role in determining truth. Many of their aberrant practices resembled the practices of animistic and eastern religions.

## Parachurch Organisations

- Many nondenominational groups were set up to promote Christian work after World War II. Evangelicals worked together in various ministries to fulfil the Great Commission. Some examples of such organisations are:
  - Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) — a student ministry
  - Campus Crusade for Christ — a student ministry
  - Gideons — Bibles for everyone
  - Navigators — ministry to sailors
  - World Vision International — social action and relief work





## Ecumenical Movement

- As a result of the world wars, economic crises and new theological movements, there arose a new interest in ecumenism. “Ecumenism” comes from the Greek word “oikoumene” which means “whole inhabited world”. Within Christianity, this term is used to describe the various movements and attempts towards Christian unity within the visible church. Key church leaders established the **World Council of Churches (WCC)** in 1948. This is the largest effort of Protestants working towards unity. The Roman Catholic Church did not participate in this because they continue to insist that all non-Catholic churches should return to the “mother church”. Some Protestant churches also declined membership as they were concerned that the WCC might be too liberal in its outlook.
- Outside of Christianity, “ecumenism” has also been broadly defined as “a movement that promotes worldwide unity among all religions through greater cooperation.” For example, a Christian priest may invite a Muslim imam to speak in his pulpit, or a church may get together with a Hindu temple to hold a joint prayer service.



## Churches and Denominations

- In the past, the “denomination” label was more helpful than it is in the modern day. Previously, when referring to a particular denomination, it would be clear what theology those in that group believe. However, in contrast, many **differences between Christians now are not so much based on denomination** than they are on other categorisations such as “liberal” versus “conservative”, or “non-evangelical” and “evangelical”. Within denominations today, there is often a wide spectrum of beliefs. For example, an evangelical Presbyterian would have more in common with evangelical Baptists than with non-evangelical Presbyterians.
- In addition, large historical denominations such as the Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterians in the different countries may not share the same beliefs as they might have had in the past. As the church became more global and growth in churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America far outpaced Europe and North America, **some denominations moved away from a centralised authority structure**. This means that though they may be labelled as the same denomination, their beliefs and teachings may no longer be the same in all matters.
- There is also an increasing number of **non-denominational churches**. A non-denominational church is any church which is not part of a larger denomination. In general, these churches have the freedom to direct the ministry and teaching of the local church without interference or control from elsewhere.

## Summary

God has led the church through 2,000 years of history. In that time, the gospel and Christianity has gone out into all the world and the Bible has been translated fully or partially into more than 3,000 languages. Through persecution and through times of dominance, God has continued to grow the church so that even today, disciples continue to be made from the ends of the earth.

## Reflections on the History of the Church

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The history of God's church may seem messy, chaotic, confusing and very complicated. Though we have only gone through our history from mankind's finite and limited perspective, we need to recognise that God Himself has never stopped working throughout history. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ has been directing the affairs of His church. But unlike the events recorded in the Bible, we lack the "behind-the-scene" details of God's perspective on how He has been directing the church.

Nevertheless, we are not left completely clueless because Christ has described in Scriptures what would be happening during this interim period before He removes His true church from the earth, and brings about the events of the Tribulation which end with His second coming. This advance information reassures us that history is heading towards the end that God has in mind. We therefore can live with the assurance that God is in control and there is a great future that awaits us.

In the mean time, there are many reflections we can have when we review the history of the church. Here are six thoughts.

1. We should be thankful to God for orchestrating the preservation of His Word through the ages, and for faithful believers that worked hard so that we had the opportunity to hear the Good News, **come to believe in Christ** and be saved.
2. We should be thankful to God that we have our **own personal Bibles** in our heart language so we can read His Word for ourselves. Many Christians died to deliver His precious Word to us.
3. Regardless of which church we worship in, we must diligently and prayerfully **evaluate every teaching that we receive through the lens of Scripture**. Man's reasoning, experience, feelings, agenda or tradition must not be our ultimate source of truth. Only God and His Word should be our ultimate source of truth. If we had unquestioningly accepted teachings in the past, we should humbly seek God and His help to make His Word clear to us.

### **1 John 4:1**

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world.

### **Acts 17:11**

And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.

4. We need to understand what the **essentials of the faith** are. We need to courageously and unswervingly hold on to the fundamentals of the faith. While all Christians should strive for unity within the body of Christ, there are **certain things we cannot compromise on**. We cannot align ourselves with cults even if they reference Jesus' name. We cannot align with those who reject the fundamentals of the faith no matter how sincere they seem.

5. On **secondary issues of the faith**, we need to be willing to exercise wisdom, love and grace. God gives latitude with regards to matters such as worship styles, baptism by immersion, sprinkling, etc. Do not treat secondary issues as we would the essentials of the faith.

### **Ephesians 4:2–3**

<sup>2</sup> Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

### **1 Peter 3:8**

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

### **2 Corinthians 13:11**

Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

6. Recognise that how we, as Christians, deal with the issues of our day will impact **future generations of the church**. For example, because the church in the past had compromised on ideas like evolution, many generations were led astray. What we believe, and what we pass on, has impact on generations of Christians to come. Let us all prayerfully hold on to God's Word and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we will all leave a God-honouring legacy for those who will come behind us. May all who come behind us find us faithful and true to God's Word.

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## **Endnotes**

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## Appendix: Differences in Beliefs

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What do the Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and Traditional Seventh Day Adventists believe?

### Examples of Bible-based religions that add or take away from the 66 Books of the Bible

Who	What they added	What they subtracted
Roman Catholicism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OT Apocrypha</li> <li>• Papal authority (Authority of the Pope)</li> </ul>	
Jehovah's Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charles Taze Russell's writings (e.g., Studies in the Scriptures) and Watchtower and Awake! Publications as supreme over the Bible</li> <li>• Modern governing authorities of the JWs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changed the Bible to mean things other than what it plainly says (they came up with their own Bible translation called the New World Translation)</li> </ul>
Mormons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joseph Smith's writings (The Book of Mormon, The Pearl of Great Price, Doctrines and Covenants)</li> <li>• Modern prophets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changed nearly 4,000 Bible verses to conform to their own theology (they have their own translation called the Joseph Smith Translation changed from KJV 1833)</li> </ul>
Seventh Day Adventist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ellen White's teachings</li> </ul>	

## Roman Catholicism

### Differences in what it teaches

#### Regarding the Church

- The pope is **infallible** when he speaks as the supreme teacher of the church, meaning that he is incapable of teaching any false doctrine. (This is also true of the bishops.) The pope claims apostolic succession.
- The Church's **unwritten "Tradition"** has the same authority as the written Scripture (meaning that man-made ideas and practices accumulated over the centuries is the basis for their interpretation of God's Word).
- The **Apocrypha** is accepted as the Word of God and so teachings in the Apocrypha such as praying for the dead are accepted as Scripture.

#### Regarding Mary

- Mary is **sinless** with no original sin and no personal sin.
- Mary remained a **virgin** her whole life.
- Mary did **not die** like other humans: God took her body and soul to heaven supernaturally.
- Mary has **many titles** including, "Mother of the Church", "Queen over all things", Mother of Mercy, the All-Holy One", "the Mother of God" and she intercedes for all people.
- Mary **must be venerated** above all people and angels. The Church distinguishes between "worship", which is reserved for God alone and "veneration", which is reserved for Mary and the saints. However, in practice, it is very hard to see the difference.
- Mary is venerated using the **rosary** which is the epitome of the whole gospel. The rosary involves repetition of a prayer to Mary 50 times, punctuated after every 10 with the Lord's Prayer. The repeated prayer to Mary is, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

#### Regarding salvation

- Justification is a **life-long process** that starts with baptism and includes the repeated use of the sacraments and the person's cooperation through good works. Then after death, it includes some time in purgatory.
- Jesus' atonement is insufficient to pay for sins. Catholics must cooperate with God by participating in the **sacraments** (which are baptism, eucharist, confirmation, penance, marriage, holy orders, extreme unction).

## Regarding the sacraments

- The act of **baptism** causes the new birth (saves a person), frees the person from darkness, provides forgiveness of all personal sins, makes the person a temple of the Holy Spirit and incorporates the person into the Church.
- The **eucharist** is the “unbloody reenactment” of Jesus’ sacrifice at Calvary, so Jesus dies again and again each time the Lord’s Supper is practiced. The bread and wine transubstantiates (changes) into the literal body and blood of Christ.
- Taught since 1439, **purgatory** is the place where a Catholic person goes to when they die. There, they must undergo purification to achieve the holiness necessary to enter heaven. To help those in purgatory, the Church encourages prayer for the dead, almsgiving, indulgences and penance on their behalf.
- **Penance** must be performed to get forgiveness of sins. This includes confession to a Catholic priest, fasting, prayer, almsgiving, tears of repentance, prayers for the saints, acts of charity, reading Scripture and praying parts of the liturgy.
- **Indulgence** is a payment that can be made to God to remove either part or all of the punishment due to sin. This can be done personally or for the dead.

## Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs)

### Background

- In late 19<sup>th</sup> century, 18-year old **Charles Taze Russell** started a Bible class that rejected many biblical doctrines and taught doctrines that were not from the Bible. His ideas came from Adventists and others who speculated about Bible prophecy. He wanted to share these ideas as far and wide as possible, so he started two magazines to distribute his ideas.
- After Russell’s death, the second president, **Joseph Franklin Rutherford** took over. He added more distinctive doctrines. And they also started using the name “Jehovah’s Witnesses”.
- The JWs came up with their own translation of the Bible, the **New World Translation** and claim it is the only version that can be trusted (even though they say it’s an anonymous work). They changed the Bible to agree with their theology. For example, referring to Jesus, John 1:1 says “...and the Word was God”. They changed it to “...and the Word was a god”.
- Today, hundreds and thousands of their two magazines, **Watchtower** and **Awake!** are distributed in over 200 languages.

## Differences in what it teaches

There are many but here are some key areas.

### Regarding God

- The **Trinity** is a pagan, polytheistic teaching.
- The “holy spirit” is an impersonal force of Jehovah.
- God does **not know everything**. When Adam and Eve sinned, God was surprised because he exercised selective foreknowledge, meaning he chose not to know what they would do.

### Regarding Jesus

- Jesus is **not God**. He was **created** by God as Michael the archangel. Jesus must not be worshipped.
- Jesus died only for Adam’s sin, not the whole world (our personal sin is our responsibility). And Jesus was **not raised** from the dead in his body.

### Regarding salvation

- Salvation (justification) depends on a **person’s works and obedience**. Only JWs will be saved. But there is no assurance of salvation.
- The “**works**” they must do include being moral, not celebrating birthdays and holidays, no saluting flags or serving the state, not participating in blood transfusions, attending JW meetings, distributing JW publications, conducting home studies, giving financially to JWs, attending the Lord’s Evening meal, etc.
- Unbelievers will be given a **second chance** after they die.
- There is no such place as hell. God would never punish people for all eternity. He will **annihilate** them.
- Death **acquits** a person of personal sin.



## Regarding the JW's

- They say that Christianity is a false religion. The JW's say theirs is the **only true religion** and there is no salvation apart from membership in the JW organisation. (The members meet in buildings called "Kingdom Halls".)
- The Bible can only be properly understood with the help of the **JW publications**. Independent study of the Bible is banned.
- The **Governing Body** of the JW's cannot be disobeyed as they are Jehovah's representatives on earth. Disobeying them is seen as disobeying Christ.
- The **JW's replaced Israel** and the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 14:1 refer to 144,000 JW's who will rule with Jesus in heaven.

## Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)

### Background

- Founded by **Joseph Smith, Jr.** in 1830. As a 14-year old boy, seeing that there were many denominations, Joseph claimed he was confused about which was the true church. When he prayed for help, he said an overwhelming force bound his body and tongue and a thick darkness came over him. A light descended from heaven and he saw the Heavenly Father and His Son. The Son told him that all the denominations were wrong and the members were all corrupt and he should not join any of them.
- Three years after that event, he sought another revelation and that night an angel named Moroni appeared to him and said that God had a great work for him and he would receive a **book written on plates of gold** that contained the truth and he would restore the truth to the world. Joseph "translated" these golden plates and produced **the Book of Mormon**. (Before finding the golden plates, Joseph's family was involved in **occult practices** and continued in these practices even after he claimed to have been visited by Moroni.)
- Today, there are around 150 **Mormon temples** over 6 continents and they run three **universities** named after their second president, Brigham Young in Utah, Idaho and Hawaii.

### Differences in what it teaches

There are many but here are some key areas.

### Regarding God the Father

- The Heavenly Father is called **Elohim**. He was **once a man** who was created by a god (who was created by another god and so on). As a man, he earned his status to become God through obedience to his spiritual father (the one who created him).
- Elohim is not a spirit but has **flesh and blood**. He currently lives on a planet near the star Kolob.

- Elohim has at least one wife with whom he created spirit children. There are billions of other spirit beings sired in this way by the Heavenly Father.

## Regarding God the Son

- Jesus whom they call **Jehovah**, is the **firstborn spirit child** of the Heavenly Father and Mother in a period and state known as “preexistence”. The second-born was Lucifer, so Lucifer and Jesus are brothers.
- The way that Jesus was born as a human happened this way: the Heavenly Father’s lawful wife is the Virgin Mary and through **normal sexual union**, they produced Jesus.

## Regarding the Holy Spirit

- There is no such thing as the Trinity. The Godhead are three different gods who are united in purpose. The Holy Spirit is a god without a body.

## Regarding mankind

- All humans are children of the Heavenly Father and Mother(s). It is the role of families on earth to **provide bodies** for the spirit children to inhabit. They will then go through probationary testing here on earth to determine their worthiness to return to live with their Heavenly Father.
- The **Fall of Man was a good thing** because without it, the spirits cannot be tested and cannot learn and progress towards godhood.
- Mankind can be **promoted to become god** (just like what happened to the Heavenly Father) through degrees of sanctification.

## Regarding salvation

- The four **ordinances** of the gospel are faith in Jesus, repentance, baptism by immersion (because baptism causes forgiveness of sins) and laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Salvation is based on **works** also because the work of God is not sufficient for mankind to be saved.
- The **dead** can be baptised.

## Seventh-Day Adventists

### Background

- Founded by **William Miller, a false prophet** who predicted that Jesus would return the second time (second “advent”) in 1843 or 1844. Followers were called “Millerites”. When Jesus did not return as predicted, the Millerites disbanded.
- A few Millerites claimed to have **visions** to explain why the prophecy failed. One of them was 17-year old **Ellen G. Harmon**. She claimed she had her first of 2,000 visions in a prayer meeting after Miller’s disgrace.
- Ellen united the disillusioned Millerites and became the spiritual guide for this new group. She married James White, an Adventist preacher, and later had another vision which she claimed confirmed her belief that Sabbath-keeping was for all Christians. The Adventists under Ellen became the Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen was a prolific writer and **her writings shaped their doctrine**. She wrote a lot of “prophetic material” on topics such as the cosmic war between Jesus and Satan, healthy eating habits (she calls it the “gospel of health”), restrictions on meat, etc. Many today still regard Ellen as a prophetess of God even though many of her prophecies failed to come true.
- Today, there are many **different degrees of Seventh-day Adventism**. For example, some do not follow the teachings of Ellen White. Some hold that the Bible is the authority. To better understand a Seventh-Day Adventist, it is best to find out more about that individual’s beliefs.

### Differences in what it teaches

- **Worship services** should be conducted on the “seventh day” (Sabbath, Saturday).
- **Satan** is the “scapegoat” and will bear believers’ sins.
- **Jesus** is the archangel Michael in Jude 1:9.
- Jesus entered a second phase of His redemptive work by entering the heavenly Holy of Holies (from the Holy Place) on October 22, 1844 (the year of the failed return of Christ).
- **Soul sleep**: humans do not have an immortal soul and after death, there is no consciousness.
- **Annihilation**: unbelievers will not suffer eternal death but will be annihilated or permanently destroyed.
- **Spirit of Prophecy**: The ministry of Ellen G. White is commonly referred to as the “Spirit of Prophecy” and her writings “speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.” (They consider Revelation 19:10, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” to be a reference to Ellen G. White’s writings.)